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A South African Story

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A STORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIFE

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THE MILNERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY AT NATCHLEY BRIDGE.

It had been raining steadily all day at the important town of Birkhampton, in the Midlands, and now that night was closing in it had increased to a storm. The wind whistled round the houses, and the rain poured down in torrents;—or, to use the expression of the smart, young clerk who stood buttoning up his coat preparatory to leaving the large counting-house of Blackwood and Barnes—"like cats and dogs."

When he had finished the buttoning business, folded his muffler around his throat, and carefully fastened his gloves, he turned and laid a detaining hand on the shoulder of a young man who, with a companion, was about to quit the room. "Come, now, you two fellows," he exclaimed, "change your minds and dine with me to-night. Come, now, you might as well be sociable."

"Thank you, Forde," answered the taller and elder of the two rather coldly, "I would come with pleasure, but, as I told you before, I have an engagement to-night which I must fulfil."

"Well, you come then, Milner, you have no engagement, I know, and you need not fear that I am inviting you to discuss Mrs. Wyge's doubtful dainties, for I intend ordering the dinner from the George Hotel, Do come; Jack has just sent me a dozen or two of capital wine and some choice cigars, and I want your opinion of them; besides, I should like to talk over the affair of the forgery with you. By Jove! I'd give a fiver, poor as I am, to know who served old Blackwood such a shabby trick."

"I really cannot accept your invitation," the young man thus addressed answered wearily and a trifle impatiently.

"I have no engagement it is true, but I feel seedy and out of sorts to-night, and I should only prove a death's head at your feast. Ask Gay; he is a far better judge of old wine than I, and," he added somewhat scornfully, "far more interested in the forgery. I must confess that, for my part, I am rather tired of the subject; little else has been discussed in the house for a fortnight past."

"I don't want Gay," returned the other eagerly, "and I'll promise not to allude to the forgery again. In fact, I'm half sick of it myself. But I say, Gerald, I didn't know that *you* went in for feeling dull and out of sorts, and all that kind of thing."

"I don't 'go in' for it as a rule, but I suppose a fellow may be excused for allowing his spirits to go down once in a way, especially on a damp, wretched, depressing evening like this."

"Wretched and depressing! I should think it was; and isn't that the very reason I want to have a jolly time and forget all that's going on outside. But, of course, if you don't care about coming, I wont press you; only let me advise you, as a friend, don't let your spirits go down on any pretence whatever. 'Keep jolly, come what may,' is my motto, and a very good one I've always found it. Well, ta, ta," and he sprang down the steps, hailed a passing cab, and drove off in the rain and mist. His two companions watched the cab till its two red lamps disappeared round a corner; then they left the shelter of the porch and proceeded to fight their way down the street in the teeth of the wind. Not a word was spoken by either until they turned into a more sheltered street, when young Milner, linking his arm in that of his companion, began eagerly:

"Despard, answer me the question I asked you just now when Forde interrupted us. Have you noticed any change in Mr. Steel's manner towards me of late? Answer me frankly."

"Well, yes; I have observed that he is not quite so cordial as formerly."

"And what do you suppose is the reason?"

The other hesitated for some moments, and then replied constrainedly: "I really cannot say. Do you yourself know of no reason for his change of manner?"

"No, I do not; none whatever. I only know that his manner has changed from the most cordial friendliness to arctic coldness."

"How long is it since you noticed the change?"

"Since three or four weeks ago. I don't know exactly how long—not very long,"

"No; since exactly three weeks ago, and I think you can guess the reason as well, or perhaps better, than I can."

The words were uttered with slow, deliberate emphasis, and produced exactly the effect the speaker had intended. Young Milner started as if he had been struck a sudden blow; the hot indignant blood rushed to his face, then receded slowly leaving him very pale.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a low voice. "Explain yourself in Heaven's name!"

"My dear boy," said Despard, still calmly and with a shade of scorn now in his quiet voice, "don't excite yourself, pray. There is nothing to explain. I am glad for your sake that old Steel is not here just now."

"And why, pray?" demanded Milner haughtily. "I am not glad. I have nothing to fear from Steel or any other man."

"No, no; of course not. I only meant to say that if he were here, your excited manner and strange look when the subject of the theft and forgery was hinted at would go far to confirm the suspicion with which I fear he already regards you."

"Do you mean to say—do you mean to insinuate anything so false, so monstrous as that Steel suspects *me* of robbing the firm?"

"Gerald, why do you pain yourself and me by asking such questions? You know, as well as I do, that he suspects you, and if you will think the matter out calmly, you will see that he has every excuse for doing so. The notes were abstracted from his private safe; no one had access to that safe but you. Steel knows that you had contracted debts which your allowance was quite inadequate to pay, and he knows that those debts were settled a few days after the forgery. He knows also that you are young, Gerald, and, I doubt not makes every excuse for you; and so do I also, but I must say, I think you have managed the affair very clumsily."

"Despard!" gasped Milner wildly, "do you mean to say—you surely do not mean to say that you, who know me better than anyone else in the world, suspect me; that you can for one moment imagine that I—that I," his voice broke and he buried his white, stricken face in his hands.

The smile of malignant satisfaction which crossed Despard's face was replaced the next instant by an expression of sorrowful pity. He laid his hand gently on the shoulder of the agitated youth, saying kindly, "My poor boy! this is a bad business—a very bad business. I pity you from my heart."

"I don't want your pity," Gerald replied passionately, flinging off the hand. "I ask you if you, who have called yourself my friend, imagine for one moment that I—a gentleman and a Milner—have, for the sake of paying a few paltry debts, soiled my hands by stealing Blackwood's money? though I don't know how I can bring myself to ask the question."

"It is hardly worth while. As I say, I pity and make every excuse for you; but don't deny the forgery, at least, in the face of such evidence as this;" and pausing under one of the street lamps he smoothed out a crumpled piece of paper and held it towards Milner. At the top of it was pasted a piece of paper evidently cut from a letter on which was written the well-known signature of Mr. E. W. Blackwood, and underneath, in what Gerald, at the first glance, thought to be his own handwriting, was his own name, "Gerald Milner," and then several times the name of E. W. Blackwood, the latter growing each time more and more like the signature at the top, while that written at the bottom of the page was sufficiently like the old gentleman's clear, bold signature, to be mistaken for it by those who knew it best.

Milner looked at the paper for a long time in silence, and then turning to his companion asked, in a voice which he strove in vain to render calm, "Despard, what does this mean?"

"It means," the other answered coldly, "that some one has been copying Mr. Blackwood's signature, with a view to forging his name, and has succeeded uncommonly well. Blackwood himself could hardly swear that that last signature was not written by his own hand."

"But, my name, written all over the page in what looks exactly like my own writing!"

"It does indeed look like your writing," Despard replied, still more coldly, the expression of disgust deepening on his face. "So like that there is no one in the counting-house, from old Steel down, who could not and would not swear that it is yours."

"But it is not mine, Despard. I never saw that lying paper before."

Despard did not answer, but taking the paper from his hand, folded it up and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Do you hear me, Despard," repeated Milner passionately, "I swear before heaven that I never held that paper in my hand, nor saw it before to-night."

"I hear you."

"And do you mean to insult me by saying that you doubt my word."

"I mean to say nothing. Come, let us walk on to the bridge, we can talk uninterruptedly there, and I see curious glances are being cast at us here. Now, Gerald," he continued, as the young man obeyed, "listen to me, I am a good deal older than you, and I know the world far better. Take my advice, do not waste time in denials which are worse than useless in the face of such incontrovertible proof as I hold here. Old Steel picked up the paper which I have just shown you, together with a letter of Mr. Blackwood's with the signature cut off, and which I know you received from him a week or two ago; he found them lying under your office stool, though how you came to be so careless as to carry them about with you and drop them there, of all places in the world, heaven only knows! Take my advice, go to Blackwood and make a clean breast of the whole affair. He is the best-natured fellow in the world, and I know of no one more likely to deal leniently with a young fellow who has got himself into a scrape than he. Take my word for it he will do his best to hush the whole thing up. Of course," he added, "I understand perfectly well that you never meant to steal the money. You only appropriated it for a time, intending to return it as soon as possible, and old Blackwood will understand it too, I don't doubt. Why, you may not even lose your place in the counting-ho——"

But here Gerald Milner interrupted him with clenched fists and flashing eyes. "How dare you utter such words to me?" he demanded in a voice which the very intensity of his passion rendered calm. "You know, as well as I do, that I would rather spend my life in prison—that I would rather die a thousand deaths than touch a penny which was not my own."

"Milner," returned the other, quite unmoved by his passionate indignation, "I should never have thought less of you on account of this little affair, for I know that the best

fellows in the world sometimes yield to temptation in an unguarded moment; but really, deliberate falsehood is a thing I cannot excuse in any man, and I beg you, as you value my friendship, utter no more denials."

"Your friendship forsooth!" cried Milner in fierce scorn. "Is it my friend who is the first to suspect me of forgery and theft, and to accuse me of lying? I think enemy would be the better word."

"Just as you please; at all events, we shall not be friends in the future, unless you confess your fault like a man, instead of denying it like a cowardly schoolboy afraid of a flogging. No, Milner, do not raise your hand against me. I have no wish to fight with you, and besides I am the stronger, and in a struggle you would undoubtedly come off second best."

"Will you retract your base words?"

"No, I will retract nothing; but I will request you to discontinue your visits to my cousin. Will you promise to do so?"

"No, I will not."

"Then instead of requesting I will command. Laurie is my ward as well as my cousin, and I do not choose that she shall receive the addresses of a man who has so little sense of honour or decency as to add the crime of lying to those of forgery, and the——"

But the foul word was never finished, for Milner's fierce grasp was on his throat. Despard was the taller and heavier of the two, but passion, indignation, and a burning sense of wrong, lent strength to Milner's arm, and he held the other entirely at his mercy.

"Unhand me," gasped Despard, struggling to free himself from Milner's vice-like grasp. "Release me! Have you no sense of shame?"

"No; I am ashamed of nothing but of having called you, hypocrite and calumniator, my friend!—of that I am bitterly ashamed." Milner's grasp unconsciously relaxed somewhat, and Despard was able to reply,

"And I am ashamed that I could have been so deceived in any man as I have been in you. I shall regret as long as I live that I introduced you to my cousin, and permitted her to receive the visits and attentions of a man of your character and disposition. But, thank heaven, she was never deceived; her pure clear eyes read you more truly than mine. I thought she judged you hardly, but, after all, she was right."

"You lie when you say that Laurie thinks ill of me, and you know it. But I will bandy no more words with you—liar! scoundrel! I scorn myself when I think that I ever liked or trusted you;" and loosing his grasp of Despard he pushed him from him with all his strength. Despard staggered, reeled, and fell backwards down the steep slippery bank of the river, the very existence of which Gerald had forgotten until he heard Despard's wild despairing cry, as his white face rose for a moment above the inky waters and then disappeared.

For an instant Milner stood staring half stupified into the dark, swirling stream which had swallowed up his late antagonist, and then flinging off his coat he plunged in after him. But it was in vain that he swam from place to place and peered through the darkness to catch sight of Despard's face; it had disappeared for ever, and at length in despair he climbed up the bank again. He was drenched and dripping, stiff and benumbed with cold, but he never heeded, never felt it. The awful knowledge that he had taken a life, which was burning itself into his heart and brain, rendered him insensible to every other feeling. Not wilfully, not intentionally, but none the less certainly had he sent to a sudden and awful death the man whom but yesterday he had been proud to call his friend. The terrible word *murdered* seemed to dance in letters of fire before him and hiss itself into his ears whichever way he turned, and with a cry as of some hunted animal, he turned and fled away into the darkness with one thought, one absorbing desire, to blot out the recollection of that white despairing face as he had seen it before the black water had closed around and covered it.

A week later the body of Guy Despard was found and identified, and a warrant was out for the apprehension of Gerald Milner. The crime had been easily traced to him, several of his brother clerks swore that Despard had left the office in his company; a policeman swore to having seen them standing together under a certain lamp-post near the river; they seemed to be reading a letter, he said, and young Milner had appeared to be very much excited. More than one witness testified to having seen two gentlemen answering to their description standing on the bank of the river, and an overcoat was found near the spot half buried in the mud, which was identified as the one Milner had worn on the night of the tragedy. Detectives were searching for him all over England, descriptions of him were pub-

lished in every newspaper, a reward was offered for his apprehension, but without result; he had gone and left no trace behind; if the earth had opened and swallowed him up he could not have vanished more completely.

CHAPTER II.

LAURIE'S DREAM.

A CHEERFUL coal fire burned in the grate, and threw its ruddy light over the small, rather meanly furnished parlour where Laurie Despard stood trying to reduce to order the scattered sheets of music with which the piano, the table, and most of the chairs were littered. It lit up with a golden glory the fair hair that rippled away from her brow, and lent a bright, fictitious colour to her pale, delicate face.

"I am so glad it is Saturday," she said with a little sigh, and pressing her hand to her side. "No more lessons till Monday. What should we do without Sunday, auntie?"

"I do not know, dear; I often wonder if the people who try to do away with the day of rest have any idea of what it means to us poor people who have to toil from Monday morning till Saturday night."

"I don't suppose they know what the words 'work and weariness' mean," rejoined the girl, sinking down at her aunt's feet, and spreading out her frail, white hands before the blaze. "I wish I did not."

"Are you so tired, to-night?" asked the elder lady, laying her hand caressingly on the soft, wavy hair. "You got up too early, dear, and practised too long."

"No, it is not that; but I feel so low-spirited and depressed to-night. I feel as if something dreadful had happened or was going to happen. Do you believe in presentiments, auntie?"

"No, I do not; I believe in nothing so absurd. Don't talk of presentiments, child; you are tired and nervous and it is long past our usual tea-time. Do you expect any one this evening, dear?"

"I don't know, auntie; we expected Guy and Mr. Milner last night and they did not come. It is strange too; Guy seldom absents himself for a whole week; I hope he is not ill."

"Of course he is not," replied her aunt almost sharply;

"or if he is it is nothing serious, or Mr. Milner would have come to tell us. Don't worry yourself about that, child."

"I am not worrying, auntie, only I think it is strange. Guy always spends at least three evenings a week here when I have no engagements to sing, and he knew I had only two this week; and Gerald—Mr. Milner I mean—was coming on Thursday to sing those German songs. Don't you remember, auntie?"

"Yes, I remember; but probably they have both been kept at the office; there may be a press of business; or—or something of that kind," she concluded rather lamely, for she herself found it somewhat difficult to account satisfactorily for the sudden cessation of the visits of the two young men.

"No, it is not that," said Laurie firmly, "or they would have written."

Just at that moment the maid entered, carrying the tea-tray in one hand and in the other a soiled and crumpled note.

"I beg your pardon, miss," she said, handing the letter to Laurie, "this was brought here after you and Mrs. Lee went out, and I quite forgot to give it to you when you came in."

"Who brought it, Anne?"

"The boy, miss, as works at Mrs. Giles' where Mr. Despard lodges. I hope you'll excuse me for forgettin'; but I was that busy, and missus that cross, that I couldn't remember nothin'."

Mrs. Lee turned up the gas, and Laurie with trembling fingers opened the note. She read it through twice with blanched cheeks.

"What is it, Laurie? Who is it from?" her aunt asked in alarm.

"It is from Guy's landlady. She writes to ask if we know where he is: she says he left her house as usual yesterday morning and has not since returned. Oh, auntie, something terrible has happened! I know it—I feel it."

"My dear child," began Mrs. Lee, soothingly, "there is nothing to be alarmed about I am sure. Mr. Despard has most probably gone to London on business for the firm, and will come in presently and laugh at your fears. But what are you doing?"

"I am writing to ask Mr. Milner where Guy is; he is sure to know." She folded the note hurriedly and rang the

bell. Anne appeared in answer to the ring. "Is Joe here yet?" Laurie asked.

"Yes, miss; he's stayin' to help me wash up the dishes."

"Will you spare him to go an errand for me, Anne? It will not take him long."

"To be sure," replied Anne obligingly. "He can go an' welcome. I'll send him up."

"Do you know where Mr. Milner lodges?" Laurie asked, as Joe put his rough red head and round red face in at the door.

"Mr. Milner; him as comes here often with Mr. Despard? I know."

"Then Joe I will give you a shilling if you will take this note to him. Wait for an answer, and come back as quickly as you can."

"Now, Laurie," said Mrs. Lee in decided tones, as Joe disappeared, and they heard the street door close after him with a bang, "don't sit shivering there like that. Really, child, what will become of you if you allow every trifling circumstance for which you cannot immediately account to upset you in this way? Come and get your tea, and behave like a reasonable girl, do."

"But is it not strange, auntie?" asked the girl, as she sat down and took the cup her aunt handed to her.

"Yes, it does seem a little strange, but then so do dozens of things, which turn out quite simple afterwards."

"I should not think so much of it," said Laurie slowly, "but that I had such a terrible dream last night; it has haunted me ever since. I dream't that I was standing on a bridge in the rain and darkness, waiting for something or some one. Below the bridge rushed a swift, black, stream. Presently, as I waited in the cold and darkness, a tall man came up to me, and, pointing down into the swirling water, exclaimed, "Look! he is there!" The voice sounded familiar, and instead of looking down I looked up into his face, and saw that he was Gerald Milner. Then, before I could speak, he was gone. I thought that, surprised and frightened at his words, and wild, strange manner, I hurried after him. I thought that I had walked half across the bridge, when a strange fear and an impulse to look into the river seized me; and, hurrying back to the place where I had first stood, I looked down into the stream, and then—oh! I shall never forget the horror of it—a face appeared for a moment above the black

waters—a white, despairing, agonised face. Oh, auntie, *it was Guy's!*"

Mrs. Lee made no comment when Laurie paused shudderingly, she was at a loss what to say, and a sort of superstitious fear, for which she could not account and of which she was half ashamed, had taken possession of her, and, in silence, broken only by the falling embers in the grate and the sharp, loud ticking of the clock, they waited for Joe's return. It seemed a long time before they heard the street door open and shut and Joe's shuffling steps come up the stairs.

Mrs. Lee hurried to the door. "Well, Joe, where is the note?" she asked.

"There ain't no note."

"Oh, Mr. Milner is coming himself, I suppose?"

"He ain't there."

"Who is not where—what do you mean?"

"Mr. Milner ain't there, an' he ain't at Blackwood an' Barnes—not bin there since yesterday morning they say, he aint nowhere and no one knows nothin' about him.

Mrs. Lee gave him the shilling promised him and hurried back into the room just in time to catch Laurie as she fell fainting from her chair.

CHAPTER III.

SUMMONED HOME.

A GROVE of tall beech trees grew at the further end of the grounds enclosing the large, stone house known as "Miss Burnley's Seminary for Young Ladies" at St. Bede's. The ground beneath them was covered with a rustling carpet of pale gold-coloured leaves which were still falling in a soft continuous shower and fluttering down upon the heads of two persons who were sauntering slowly up and down in the chilly afternoon sunshine, about three weeks after the events related in the last chapter. They were Katherine Milner, eldest and favourite pupil of the Misses Burnley, and Graham Keith, a newly fledged M.D. and distant cousin of those learned and respected ladies.

"When did you arrive in England?" the girl was asking.

"I landed three hours ago. I shall feel quite a stranger

in London, it is a month since I left it, and three weeks since I opened an English paper."

"How dreadfully behind the time you will be!" she laughed.

"Oh, no; I shall buy all the papers on my way to town and read up."

"Is your mother still in London?"

"I do not know; but she has most probably gone down to Home Woods. My uncle was less well than usual when she wrote last, about a fortnight ago. Kathie, I am looking forward so impatiently to the time when I can introduce you to my mother."

"I wonder if she will like me," said Kathie.

"*Like* you! That is a poor word. If you had not one single lovable or attractive quality she would love you for my unworthy sake, think then how she will receive *you*; she will take you to her heart and put you in the place of the daughter she lost five years ago."

"I hope she will. I shall love *her*, I am sure."

"No one could help loving my mother," replied Dr. Keith, his blue eyes darkening with feeling. "I know no one who so quietly and unostentatiously, and, at the same time so consistently, lives out her religion in her daily life."

They were silent for a few minutes, then Kathie asked, "When do you return to London?"

"To-morrow morning, and then if I find my mother absent I must go down to Home Woods; and then, Kathie, I am going as fast as steam can carry me to see your father, and——"

But here Kathie interrupted him. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed; "no, you must not, please."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because papa will not like it—I am sure he will not."

"He will not like my visit? then I will make it a short one."

"You know I don't mean that. I mean that papa will not like what you are going to ask him; he will think it absurd for me to be engaged while I am still at school, and so it is."

"I do not see the absurdity; but I know he will think I am behaving very dishonourably if, after having won your consent to be my wife 'some day,' I delay asking his for several weeks. Will he not?"

"Perhaps; I never thought of that! but Graham——"

"But what?"

"It will only be a few weeks before school breaks up and I go home for good."

"I cannot be engaged to you for even a few weeks without your father's knowledge, Kathie," the young man answered firmly.

"But I am not engaged to you until you have obtained papa's consent."

"Yes you are; you were my promised wife from the moment that you acknowledged that you cared for me, and we shall not be treating your father fairly if we allow him to remain in ignorance of it an hour longer than we can help. Confess that I am right."

"Yes, I suppose you are," Kathie admitted rather unwillingly; "I am sure you are, but——"

"No, no; no more buts, if you are sure that I am right that settles the matter, does it not?"

"It ought to, yes. I would not for the world have papa think I was acting undutifully towards him. Dear papa! Oh, Graham, now the time for me to go home is so near I begin to wonder how I have been content to stay away so long. How delightful it will be to see papa every day and Gerald often, and to have the children with me all the time! I always feel that I have not done my duty by Pearl and the boys in remaining so long at school, although it has been by papa's own wish that I have stayed. I am glad I am going home soon, there is so much that I want to do for the children; they have been left almost entirely to the servants and the nursery governess, especially since my aunt married again and left the country. Miss Burnley was talking to me this morning of all the duties and responsibilities which will be mine when my school life is over. She says that I must be a mother to the children, and I wish to be, but I know that I am neither good enough nor wise enough to train them properly."

"My poor, motherless, Kathie!" exclaimed the doctor, tenderly pressing the hand that rested on his arm. "You will soon learn; your love for them will teach you, and my mother will be always willing to help you when you need advice; she will be a mother to them as well as to you if you will let her."

"Oh, thank you," replied Kathie gratefully; "it will be so nice to have some one to go to for advice in any difficulty, and I am sure to get into difficulties before long, I fear.

Some one who really knows, Miss Mary, has given me a great deal of good advice, and has written down a number of rules for the children's education, but they do not at all accord with my own ideas of the subject. I could not bear to have them live in the stiff, formal manner which she considers right, and I am certain I can never behave in the cold, undemonstrative fashion which she says is the only way to make them respect and obey me."

Dr. Keith laughed, not unsympathisingly however.

"Miss Mary has lived among the sciences and ologies until she has grown as blue as indigo," he said irreverently. "I don't know much about the matter to be sure, but I do not think you will find rules of much use to you, no matter how good and wise they are; a rule which might be good in one case would be worse than useless in another. One boy might be cured of a fault by a sound whipping, while a kiss and a quiet word would in the case of another be a more effectual remedy. Don't listen to Miss Mary; you know more about the matter now than she does."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Kathie. "But I am so glad to think that your mother will help me. I wish she would come and see me—when I go home, I mean."

"I am sure she will, if you wish it; as soon, that is, as she can leave my uncle. He is an invalid, you know, and very exacting. My poor mother is a perfect slave to his whims; she spends the greater part of her time at Home Woods."

"What is your uncle's name, Graham, I have forgotten?"

"Colonel Graham Keith. I am named after him. But is not this someone come to look for you, Kathie?"

"Does Miss Burnley want me, Milly?" Kathie asked of the little girl who had come up noiselessly and was standing a few yards off with her hat in her hand and her eyes fixed in an unwinking stare upon the young doctor.

"Yes, she wants you," replied the child, seating herself deliberately upon a large stone, and without removing her eyes. "She told me to tell you to come at once. I think she said she had just got a letter from your father."

"You think so, do you; very well, go and tell Miss Burnley that I will be there in one minute. I hope there is nothing wrong at home," she added turning to Graham Keith, "I do not think there can be though, for I had

letters from the children only yesterday. Are you coming in, Graham? Miss Mary will expect you."

"I think not, thank you. Should I see you if I called this evening?"

"Certainly not; I should be in the school-room."

"Then I am afraid I must deny myself the pleasure of seeing Miss Mary this time. I shall stay at the Dean's to-night; he would think I meant to slight him if I went to the hotel."

Miss Burnley and her sister were seated together in the parlour conversing in low tones when Kathie entered the room. They stopped abruptly when they saw her.

"Miss Burnley," she began with characteristic directness, "Milly Homes says you have just received a letter from papa. There is nothing wrong at home, is there?"

"Your father wishes you to return home at once, instead of waiting until the end of the term," Miss Burnley answered somewhat constrainedly, while Miss Mary began in a nervous manner very unusual to her to fold up and lay aside two or three newspapers which were lying on the table. Something strange in the look and manner of the two ladies, though both tried to appear as usual, struck a chill of fear to the girl's heart, and the bright colour which her walk in the autumn wind had brought into her cheeks faded slowly.

"Miss Burnley! Miss Mary!" she exclaimed, turning from one to the other, "something *is* the matter; please do not keep me in suspense. Is papa ill, or Gerald? Why has papa sent for me?"

"Pray calm yourself, my dear child," answered Miss Burnaby kindly. "Mr. Milner has not told us why he has sent for you. He merely says that he wishes you to return home by the first train to-morrow, and apologises for the abruptness of the order. If anyone had been ill he would certainly have said so."

"To be sure he would," added Miss Mary.

"Then," said Kathie, with a sigh of relief, "if they are all well I am not afraid; nothing else matters much."

If she had seen the glance which the two ladies exchanged she might not have felt so confident. Poor Kathie! had she but known on what a rough sea—chill with grief and dark with humiliation—her little bark, which had hitherto sailed on such smooth waters, was about to be launched, her heart would have died within her. But she did not know, and she went to get ready for her early journey feeling a trifle

uneasy, but, on the whole, not much alarmed at the unexpected summons home.

"Katherine," called Miss Burnley after her as she was leaving the room, "was not that Dr. Keith with you just now in the beech walk?"

"Yes, Miss Burnley."

"Dr. Keith!" exclaimed Miss Mary in surprise, "I thought he was in Norway."

"He has just returned," replied Kathie. "I believe he said he only landed a few hours ago."

"And he has called on us at once," said Miss Burnley with a little smile of gratification. "Very nice and attentive of him."

"He should have come in at once, and not lingered in the garden," returned her sister rather severely. "Was he there very long, Katherine?"

"Not very long, Miss Mary," Kathie replied with a slight flush; she guessed that Miss Mary's remark was intended as a rebuke to her quite as much as to the doctor.

"Where is he now, Katherine?"

"He went to the Deanery. I believe he said that he suddenly remembered that he had something to say to the Dean at once, but that he would return and call on you in an hour or two."

"I should have thought his cousins had the first claim," said Miss Mary, bridling. "You may go, Katherine, my dear, and we will send Susan to help you pack your things; and you may tell the girls of your class that they need do no studies to-night—you will like to be all together for the last time, I dare say."

Kathie murmured her thanks as she left the room, though she hardly felt so grateful as Miss Mary no doubt expected, for she would have preferred a quiet evening with no other company than her own thoughts. Nevertheless, when the girls gathered around the piano in the music-room, and placed Rose Dormer the pianist of the establishment on the music-stool, she joined as heartily as any of the others in the glees and duets they sang, and laughed as merrily at the gay speeches and lively sallies of Mary Jane, the acknowledged wit of the school.

"It was very indiscreet of Dr. Keith to wander about the grounds talking nonsense to Katherine Milner, instead of coming into the house. I am surprised at him, when he knows what an objection we have to that sort of thing."

Miss Mary made this remark to her sister as the two sat correcting exercises after their pupils had retired for the night.

"What sort of thing, Mary?" inquired Miss Burnley. "I do not imagine that he talked much nonsense; he is not the man to indulge in the silly sentimental talk which some gentlemen consider the only entertainment fit for a schoolgirl, nor is Katherine Milner the girl to listen to it. She possesses more true dignity than many a woman of five-and-thirty, though she is only eighteen. Poor, poor girl," she added, "this terrible affair will be a great blow to her; she idolises that handsome young brother of hers. I wonder i we are doing right in allowing her to go home quite unprepared for what she will hear when she gets there."

"Do you think that he can be guilty?" asked Miss Mary. "It seems impossible to associate a crime so mean as theft with one apparently so proud and honourable as he, and as for murder—no, I really cannot believe it."

"It does seem impossible," replied her sister; "he seems to be the very soul of honour; and then his manners, so gentle, respectful, and chivalrous, such a contrast to the free-and-easy style adopted by the young men of the present day. I do not think he can be guilty, but it is hard to say," she added with a sad little shake of her head, "young men do so often go grievously astray. I hope most sincerely that he is innocent, for Katherine's sake."

CHAPTER IV.

TELLING KATHIE.

"GOOD-BYE" is a sad word, even when spoken to those for whom we care comparatively little, and Kathie had to say a good many good-byes the next morning: first to the girls with whom she had laughed, talked, studied, and worked for so long; next to the servants, who all regretted her departure; and last to the two sisters under whose wise and kind, if somewhat cold and formal, rule she had lived for nearly six years. Never had they appeared less cold and formal than now; there were actually tears in Miss Mary's clever grey eyes, and Miss Burnley kissed and blessed her with a warmth of which she had never thought her capable, and which made her feel ashamed of the many times she had thought her hard and unlovable.

She was feeling rather sad, therefore, when she took her seat in the carriage; but she had not driven a quarter of the distance to the railway station when her sadness and her fears for the safety of those at home melted away under the magic influence of the lovely autumn morning. It was impossible to imagine that when actual skies were so bright, metaphorical ones could be dark and clouded, or that when the wild, joyous song of the birds was filling all the air with melody, the sweet, spontaneous music of her own fresh, young spirit was about to be silenced for ever.

Up to this time Kathie Milner's life had been almost as cloudless as it is possible for a life to be. True, she was motherless, but though her mother's death had been a bitter grief to her, she had been too young at the time it occurred to really feel or understand the greatness of her loss. Her father had filled the place of both parents to her, and her childish life had been as wild and free as that of any bird of the forest. All the bright summer days she had spent in the fields, by the laughing brook, climbing the trees in the orchard, cantering along through the meadows by her brother's side, or, what she loved best of all, sauntering up and down the avenue in the twilight with her hand clasped fast in her father's, or sitting at his feet in the library with her favourite book in her hand.

This kind of life might have gone on for four or five years longer, but for the interference of a wise friend who, fearing that Kathie would be spoiled—Mr. Milner could not bear to deny his motherless child anything—advised him to send her away to school. It was long before he would consent to part with her, but at length, sacrificing his own wishes to what he knew to be for her good, placed her under the care of the Misses Burnley, whose school in the old cathedral city of St. Bede was famed throughout the county, and there she had remained ever since—the monotony of school life, broken by the three holidays every year spent in her beautiful old home, and by flying visits from her father and Gerald. There were a good many passengers by the early train, and Kathie was just congratulating herself upon having obtained a compartment all to herself when a gentleman hurried into the station, took his ticket, and sprang in beside her. For a moment Kathie felt very much annoyed at what she was inclined to look upon as an intrusion, the next she found her hands clasped in those of Graham Keith and was answering his amazed question—

"Why, Kathie, what are you doing here?"

It was a long journey from St. Bede's to Beechwood Hall, and it was four o'clock when the train steamed into the little station. It only stopped for two minutes, so that there was no opportunity for Dr. Keith to hand Kathie into her father's carriage, which stood waiting; there was only time for a hurried good-bye and the train was dashing on its way Londonwards. Kathie watched the great, puffing, snorting monster till it was out of sight, and then she turned to the station-master. She had known the old man all her life, and she thought that he looked strangely at her; if it had not been absurd, she would have fancied that his face wore an expression of pity.

"Do you know if all is well at Beechwood?" she asked.

"There is no one ill at the Hall," he answered, and this time she was sure that there was something strange in his tone as well as his look, and her heart sank with a great indefinable fear.

Something was wrong at home she felt, and her fears were confirmed when old Roger, the coachman, came on to the platform. The old man looked years older than when she had seen him last, only a few months ago; he avoided meeting her eyes and answered in a low, unwilling tone the eager questions she put to him.

Old Roger had, as he was proud of telling people, served the Milner family, boy and man, for more than fifty years, and he had a deep and sincere regard for every member of it, and Kathie knew that something serious must have happened to make him appear so different from his usual cheery, loquacious self.

The drive from the station to Beechwood Hall was a long one, and the road lay through some of England's fairest scenery; but Kathie scarcely glanced at the familiar landscape she loved so well; her fears were thoroughly aroused, though what it was that was wrong at home she could not guess Had some accident happened to her father, she wondered; to be sure they told her that he was well, but it was strange that he had not come himself to meet her; he had always done so before. Could Gerald be ill, or Pearl, or one of the boys? Her fears flew first to one of her loved ones and then to another, and it was a great relief to her when the carriage turned into the avenue and she caught sight of the house with the setting sun blazing upon its many windows. Poor Kathie! she was far from guessing

how soon she would have to leave that home, every moss-stained brick and lichened stone of which was dear to her; how soon it with its picturesque beauty and calm, pure joys would be nothing but a memory—a vision which would start up, mirage-like, before her in a far-off foreign land and mock her.

Was it fancy, she wondered, or did the place really wear a melancholy half-deserted look? Why did not the children come scampering down the avenue to meet her? Why were not the old servants gathered in the hall to welcome her, as they always had done when she had come home from school or from a long visit ever since she could remember? And where, above all, was her father?

She was trembling with nervousness and suspense when at last the carriage drew up before the great entrance, and when old Roger opened the door she seized his hand, exclaiming:

"Oh, Roger, something is the matter; something has happened, I feel sure! What is it? Tell me, tell me at once," she repeated as he hesitated.

"Miss Kathie," he said, in a husky voice, "I won't deny that something terrible has happened, and you'll have to know it, but it's not from me you should hear it first; the master'll tell you himself. My poor, poor master, he is sorely stricken; this blow has made an old man of him."

Leaving him, Kathie flew rather than ran up the steps; the hall was empty, but she knew where to find her father, and in a few minutes she had turned the handle of the library door and stood beside him. "Sorely stricken" indeed he looked as he sat in the dark, fireless room, his head bowed in his hands in an attitude which spoke more plainly than words of hopeless misery.

For a few seconds Kathie stood gazing through her blinding tears at him, so awfully changed, aged, and ill, and then she went up to him and threw her arms about his neck. He started as if suddenly aroused from a dream, and then without a word he folded his arms around her and bowed his head in mute sorrow over hers. For a while Kathie stood still in his embrace, she felt that she could not break the silence; the sight of her father's despair and speechless anguish seemed to freeze the blood in her veins. But at last she could endure it no longer; she lifted her head from his shoulder, and after vainly trying to steady her voice, she

asked tremulously, "Papa, what is it—what has happened?"

Mr. Milner raised his head for a moment and then with a groan dropped it in his hands once more.

"Papa, papa," she cried, now almost beside herself with terror, "tell me what has happened. Whatever it is I can bear it better than this suspense; tell me what awful thing has happened to us."

"I will tell you when I can. You must hear it sooner or later. I would to God you need never know it; it has brought down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, and it will break your heart."

"No, papa, it will not. I can bear anything if we are only all well and all together. Perhaps, dear papa, it is not quite so bad as you fear."

"My poor child! Your words only prove how little prepared you are for what I have to tell you. You could bear all if we could be all together, so could I; but we shall never be all together again. Oh, my boy, my boy!" and he bowed his head on his hands again.

But his last words had given Kathie the clue which before she had lacked. Whatever the trouble was she knew now that it concerned Gerald; but in what way? Had he got into trouble—into debt? She had never thought it possible that proud, honourable Gerald could do any of those things which she had heard of other young men so often doing; but perhaps he had been led away against his own judgment by fast or evil companions—had gambled even, it might be. But in that case her father would be the first to forgive him. If Gerald were guilty of a fault of that kind, even a very grave one, she knew Mr. Milner, though he might be bitterly grieved and disappointed, would not be plunged into such sorrow and despair as that which now overwhelmed him. Then another thought struck her, a thought which almost made her heart stand still, and it was some time before she could command her voice to ask the question, "Is Gerald dead, papa?"

"No, he is not dead. I could almost wish he were. It would be better for him to be lying beside his mother in the churchyard yonder than to be living disgraced, dishonoured as he is."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Kathie, amazed and horrified beyond measure. "How—how could it be better? What disgrace and dishonour? Papa, will you not tell me what

is the meaning of all this? This suspense is driving me mad."

Then Mr. Milner seemed to rouse himself for the first time.

"My poor girl," he said tenderly laying his hand on her head. "This great trouble is making me selfish. I had forgotten that you left your teacher's house early this morning and have been travelling all day, you must be faint for want of food and rest. Go, Kathie, and get some refreshment, and then come to me and I will tell you all."

But Kathie would not go, she could neither eat nor rest while in such cruel suspense, she said; and Mr. Milner yielded to her, and, after ringing for wine and biscuits to be brought to the library, he told her the story which the reader already knows.

Mr. Milner spoke in a low voice, which every now and then trembled, in spite of his efforts to control it; and when he had finished he looked at Kathie expecting her to speak; but she sat with bent head and clasped hands, silent—absolutely stunned by the greatness of the blow. It was too terrible! She had imagined nothing so awful as this. Gerald, her noble, her beloved brother, who was so upright, so honourable and good, accused of murder—of theft! She could scarcely believe that she had heard aright. At length she asked the question her father had been expecting—"Papa, where is he?"

"I would give all I have in the world, Kathie, if I knew, but I do not."

"Has he not been here?"

"At Beechwood? No."

"How did you hear of it first, papa?"

"From Mr. Blackwood. He feared that I should hear of it first from the newspapers, and he wrote himself to tell me. He has behaved very kindly to me throughout the whole affair; but he is firmly convinced of Gerald's guilt."

"Convinced of Gerald's guilt! Mr. Blackwood, who has known him all his life. I do not believe him; he knows better. He must know that Gerald is as incapable of a mean, cowardly crime as he is, and more so. How dare he accuse Gerald? It is monstrous."

"He did not accuse him," replied Mr. Milner, more calmly than he had yet spoken. "Immediately upon the receipt of his letter I went to town to learn from him all the particulars. I found him greatly distressed about the matter.

He had always liked Gerald, he said; always admired what he considered his particularly frank and honourable disposition; and, until a month or two before the forgery was committed, he heard none but the best accounts of him; he was industrious, punctual, steady, interested in his work, all, in short, that a gentleman and a business man should be. But, a little while before the forgery, the accounts ceased to be favourable, and he heard that Gerald had formed friendships of which I could not possibly approve, had associated himself with some of the fastest men of the place, and had incurred debts for a large amount—debts of honour as they are called. At first he took no notice of these reports, believing them to be merely malicious falsehoods circulated by some one who was jealous of his partiality for Gerald. But he heard again, and this time, he says, from one on whom he could rely, and who would be the last to wish to injure Gerald, and he went down to Natchley for the purpose of remonstrating with him. Gerald, he says, listened to him quietly, and answered with perfect respect, thanked him for the trouble he had taken on his account, but denied having formed any improper friendships. He acknowledged that he had contracted several debts, and confessed that he had no present means of paying them; but told him that they would be paid, and that before very long. Blackwood asked him from what source he expected to receive such a sum as he confessed to be owing, but Gerald rather haughtily refused to tell him. He regretted that he had run into debt, had determined never to do so again, he fully intended to pay those he owed, and further than that he would say nothing. Mr. Blackwood returned to London, and before long the unfavourable reports were renewed, and a few weeks later occurred the forgery. He never dreamed, he says, of associating Gerald with the matter until he received a letter from Mr. Steel, and then he declares he was struck dumb with astonishment. But there was no room for doubt—Steel had not written to him until he had obtained every proof of Gerald's guilt. Papers were found which proved that he had long meditated the forgery, several sheets of paper were picked up covered with careful copies of Blackwood's writing, and especially his signature. Blackwood showed me the papers, and, Kathie, I could almost have sworn that some of the words were written by Gerald's hand. But although Blackwood had no doubt of his guilt he had no intention of trying to bring it home to

him. On the contrary he was determined to hush the matter up for my sake, and he wrote to Steel telling him to take no steps, and to try and prevent its becoming known until he himself arrived to investigate the matter. A few days later he received a telegram informing him of the strange disappearance of Gerald and Guy Despard. He went down to Natchley, and the first thing he heard when he stepped on to the platform of the railway station was that Guy Despard's body had been found, and that Gerald was suspected of having murdered him. At first he repudiated the idea with scorn, but as proof after proof was brought to light, his faith in him began to waver, and at last he was firmly convinced of Gerald's guilt. Even then he determined to hush the matter up, but by that time things had gone too far to be controlled by him. Nothing was talked of but the murder, and even those who had trusted Gerald most and liked him best did not believe him innocent. "If he were innocent why had he fled," everyone asked. The fact that he was suspected of the forgery and theft also leaked out, and Blackwood's partner was determined to prosecute. That is the story, Kathie, as Blackwood told it to me. He was very kind, very much grieved that the affair of the forgery and robbery of the safe should have become known. He made, he said, every excuse for Gerald, but his belief in his guilt is unshaken. "I do not mean," he said, "that I consider your son a murderer in the common acceptation of the term. It is my opinion that Gerald and Despard had a quarrel. Despard very probably accused him of the forgery. Steel tells me that he was aware of his suspicions, and Gerald fiercely resented it, and a struggle ensued in which Despard lost his footing and fell into the river, and then Gerald, fearing the consequences, fled."

"It is all very well for Mr. Blackwood to talk so, papa, but we know better. Gerald must have some enemy in the counting-house, some one who stole the money, and then caused the suspicion to fall upon him."

"That is my opinion also, and I said as much to Blackwood; but he shook his head at what he considered my blindness, and told me that even if he had been inclined to doubt Gerald's guilt, the facts which had transpired during the last few days would have made it impossible for him to do so."

"What were they?" asked Kathie breathlessly.

"They were that in the the pocket of the overcoat which, as I told you, was found near the spot where Gerald and Despard were standing, a purse was found which contained a Bank of England note, bearing the number of one of those stolen from the safe, and that a key also was found which unlocked a desk of Gerald's, and in that was found another of the missing notes."

"Papa," exclaimed Kathie, passionately, "it is Mr. Blackwood who is blind. All this only proves the more certainly that Gerald had some cruel enemy who was determined to bring him to disgrace and ruin."

"You and I may believe this, my darling, but who but you and I will do so? To some minds, indeed to most, his absence and silence are incontrovertible proofs of his guilt, not only of the forgery and theft, but also of the murder. Oh, my God! my God!" he broke off. "What have I ever done, that such shame and sorrow should fall upon me in my old age?"

Kathie could speak no words of comfort to her father. She could only take his hand in both of hers, and let her tears fall with his. A murderer! a forger! and a thief! The words seemed to ring in her ears, and with them came the recollection of the last time she had seen her brother in that room sitting in the very seat where now her father sat bowed down with grief and humiliation; and she remembered how merry he had been; how often his gay laugh had rung in response to some pert speech of Pearl's, and the thought of the change a few months had wrought, the bitter contrast between then and now, almost broke her heart. Then he had been happy and honoured, looked up to and beloved by every one—the idol of his proud father's heart. Now he was disgraced and dishonoured; accused of murder and theft, flying from the law, hiding like some wild animal from his pursuers; a criminal the story of whose crimes had by this time found its way into every newspaper in England and beyond it, a felon for whose capture a reward was offered. Shudderingly she covered her face with her hands to shut out the terrible picture.

"Papa," she began again—after a long silence during which the minute hand had ticked its way more than half around the clock and the long, red beams of the autumn sun had withdrawn themselves from the room slowly, as if loath to depart and leave the sorrowing father and daughter alone and in darkness—"Papa, did you try to find him?"

"Yes, and that is a part of the story I have not told you yet. I made every effort to find him, but in vain; at last I went to the house where he had lodged, thinking that, perhaps, his landlady—a very superior woman—might be able to give me some clue to his whereabouts, but she could not. She was very much distressed about what had happened, and very indignant at the accusations brought against Gerald. 'People must be mad,' she said, 'to imagine for a moment that a young gentleman like Mr. Milner could be guilty of the crimes they accused him of.' She took me to his room, where she told me nothing had been disturbed except his desk and papers, which had been seized and taken away. Oh, Kathie! it almost broke my heart to go into that room where everything was just as he had left it. His easel was standing in a corner of the room with a half-finished picture upon it, books were open upon the table, gloves and cigars lying about; it was hard to believe that he had not left the room but a moment before. I dared not stay in there where everything spoke so plainly of him; it unmanned me, I hurried downstairs, and was about to leave the house, when the landlady detained me.

"'I don't know if I ought to mention it, sir,' she began hesitatingly, 'but I think there is some one who may be able to tell you where your son is.'

"'Who is it?' I asked eagerly.

"'A young lady, sir, to whom I think Mr. Milner is attached. I judged so from finding so many sketches of her among his pictures. I will show them to you,' and she hurried away and soon returned with a large parcel of drawings and water-colour sketches.

"'I put them away,' she explained, 'because I thought Mr. Milner would not care to have detectives and policemen and such like fellows handling and making their comments upon them.'

"I was more touched than I can say by the woman's delicacy and good feeling, and I thanked her warmly for her thoughtful kindness.

"Among the drawings were several sketches of a girl with pale golden hair and soft dark eyes, and with a singularly sweet and winning expression; it was a very beautiful face, and I could readily believe that Gerald loved the original.

"'Do you know who this is?' I asked the landlady.

"'No, sir, not for certain; but I think it must be the

portrait of a young lady whom Mr. Milner often used to visit and buy flowers for—Miss Despard, a niece or cousin of Mr. Despard. She is a singer and music teacher, and lives, I believe, in lodgings with an aunt of hers. I have never seen her, but I have heard her spoken of as a very sweet young lady, and I think it must be she.'

"I obtained from the kind-hearted woman Miss Despard's address, and was very soon knocking at her door. I declined to give my name, for, Kathie—for the first time in my life—I was ashamed of it, and felt a great reluctance to own the name which was in every newsboy's mouth and blazoned in every paper in the kingdom. I was shown upstairs and received by Mrs. Lee, the young lady's aunt; she was a very pleasant, ladylike person, but she seemed to be in great trouble, and I could see that she had been weeping. I apologised for intruding upon her, and requested to see her niece, who, I said, could I thought give me some important information. But at the mention of her niece's name she burst afresh into bitter weeping, and it was some time before she could control her emotion. When she had calmed herself sufficiently to be able to speak, she turned to me.

"'Will no one believe it?' she began passionately. 'Is it not enough that the poor child is ill, dying, but that every day she must be called upon to give information and answer questions about this terrible affair, which has already nearly broken her heart? Have people no feeling, I wonder, and no other business in the world but to hunt that poor boy down to his death?'

"I told her then who I was, and how different were my motives for trying to obtain some clue to my son's whereabouts from what she supposed. 'I heard that my son visited here frequently,' I said, 'and I imagined that you or your niece might be able to tell me where he is.'

"'I beg your pardon,' she said frankly, holding out her hand. 'I hope you will forgive me for speaking so impetuously; but we have been intruded upon so often lately by detectives and persons from Mr. Blackwood's, who imagined that we could give them the information they required, that my patience is completely exhausted. Your son did visit here often with Mr. Despard, who, perhaps you know, was my niece's guardian; and we were all very intimate; but I have not the faintest idea where he is at present, neither, I assure you most solemnly, has Laurie. I would call her, and let you hear the fact from her own lips,

but that I fear the excitement would do her harm; her health has always been delicate, and it has quite broken her down under the severe and repeated mental shocks she has sustained of late. You can imagine what a shock was the news of the tragic death of her cousin, to whom from childhood she had been warmly attached, and I fear the news that Mr. Milner was accused of his murder was an even more cruel blow.'

"'Did you niece care for my son?' I asked.

"'I think so, indeed, I am sure of it, though until lately I never guessed it, though I had long known, or rather guessed, that he was attached to her; but——' She paused, for just at that moment the door opened, and a young girl came in, dressed in heavy mourning, which made her look even paler and more fragile than she really was. She was the original of poor Gerald's sketches, and oh! I shall never forget her expression of dumb despairing anguish. I had thought that no sorrow could be greater, no anguish so bitter as mine, but in the mute, hopeless pain in her great hollow, dark eyes, I read that here was a yet mightier grief. As I rose and advanced to meet her, it needed not Mrs. Lee's nervously-spoken words of introduction to tell her who I was.

"'I know,' she said, extending one wasted hand, 'it is his father. Tell me, is he safe?'

"I tried to comfort the poor, heart-broken girl, and spoke hopefully, though in my own breast hope was beginning to die out. I told her that the real murderer and thief would be found, and Gerald vindicated before the world, that the truth must come out in the end, and that the innocent would not be allowed to suffer for the guilty. I talked until I began to feel hopeful myself; but the expression in the poor girl's eyes never changed, and when I had finished speaking she only shook her head.

"'No,' she said, 'his innocence will not be proved; all looks too black against him. Oh! Gerald, Gerald!' she broke off wildly, 'if I could only see you once more before I die, and know that you were safe,' and then she fell into a fit of the most terrible coughing, which lasted a long time, and when it was over she lay back on her sofa completely exhausted, and looking so white and death-like that it was hard to believe that she was not dead; and I saw that her days on earth were numbered, that ere long she would be beyond the reach of earthly sorrow.

"I was very loath to leave her, but at length I was

obliged to go. Before I went I promised to call again to see her. I intended to go again the next day, but I was not able to do so, and it was not until two days after my first visit that I again knocked at the door of the lodging-house.

"'I don't think Mrs. Lee will see a visitor, sir,' said the woman who admitted me; 'she is ill, poor lady, and no wonder. But perhaps you are a relative,' she added.

"'I have come to see Miss Despard,' I replied; 'Mrs. Lee expects me. She is not seriously ill, I hope?'

"'No, sir, she's only upset and worn out; she's lying down now trying to get a bit of sleep; she's got a long journey before her to-night.'

"'A journey!' I exclaimed, in surprise; 'where is she going?'

"'I don't remember the name of the place, but it's a town somewhere in the north of Scotland.'

"I was surprised beyond measure, for I was sure that when I had called two days before no such journey had been anticipated, and I knew full well that to one in Miss Despard's condition such a journey at such a season would be certain death, and I resolved to remonstrate with her upon the folly and danger of such an undertaking; but then, thinking that perhaps she was not going, and that only the elder lady intended taking the journey, I inquired of the woman who was going to take care of the young lady.

"'Surely she is not going to leave her alone?' I said.

"'No, sir; it is only on her niece's account that she is going; the young lady wished to be taken to Scotland, to the place where she was born, and where her parents lie buried.'

"'But it will kill her!' I exclaimed; 'she cannot stand such a journey.'

"The woman stared at me for a minute in blank astonishment; then she exclaimed:

"'Don't you know, sir—haven't you heard? The poor young lady's gone; she died last night at twelve o'clock.'

"I could scarcely believe the woman's words. Dead! That fair young girl, in whom, for Gerald's sake, I had become so deeply interested. True, I had seen in that one short interview that the sands of her life were swiftly running out, but that she would die so suddenly and soon I had not dreamed.

"'Yes,' continued the woman, 'I knew she wasn't long for this world, but I didn't think the end would come so

soon. She didn't seem any worse in the evening, but about eleven o'clock Mrs. Lee came to me in a terrible state of mind saying that her niece was dying, and asked me to send for a doctor. I sent at once, but before he came she was gone; she went off very happy and peaceful like. Ah! she was a sweet young lady, and too good for this world, that's the truth. Maybe you'd like to see her, sir.'

"I followed her almost like one in a dream to the room where Laurie Despard lay in her coffin. She was very fair —fairer almost in death than she had been in life; the mournful look was gone, and in its place was an expression of unearthly peace; the pale lips smiled faintly and her golden hair lay like a halo about her face. She looked more like an angel just come down from some realm of infinite peace and purity than a frail, mortal body from which the soul had fled. It was death in its fairest form, and as I gazed I felt glad to think that she had reached a land where earth's sorrows had no power to touch her. As I stood beside the coffin Mrs. Lee entered the room. Her grief was deep beyond words, but she was calm and tearless. 'She was all I had in the world,' she whispered, 'and now she is gone. When I lay her in the churchyard at Craigsley I shall have nothing left on earth to care for.'

She thanked me for my words of sympathy, but declined all my offers of assistance. She had made all arrangements, she said, and would leave by the evening train for Scotland. It was poor Laurie Despard's wish to be laid beside her parents in the shadow of the little kirk where her father used to preach. She could rest better there than anywhere else, she said.

"All I could do for Mrs. Lee was to go with her to the station and take her ticket for her. 'I had almost forgotten to give you Laurie's message,' she said, as I shook hands with her at parting; 'she was so grieved at having spoken so hopelessly to you the other day. "I should not have spoken so," she said; "it was wicked of me to add to his burden of sorrow, and I know better now. I know that Gerald's innocence will be proved, and that all will come right; and ask Mr. Milner to tell Gerald that I believed in him always, that I never have had the faintest, slightest doubt of his perfect truth and honour" ".

Kathie's tears were falling fast when her father finished speaking, and it was some time before she could command her voice to speak.

"Papa," she said at length, "why did Gerald run away? He was innocent, and could have nothing to fear. Why did he not stay and face it bravely. It is unlike him, and gives people an excuse for thinking him guilty; where there is flight and fear it is natural to suppose that there is crime also."

"You are right, Kathie. As you say, it is unlike him—unworthy of him. Why he went is as hard to discover as where he has gone. I cannot understand it; the whole affair is shrouded in mystery. I have left no stone unturned to find him, but I cannot. I have inserted advertisements in every newspaper in the country—advertisements couched in words which none but he could understand, but which, if they meet his eye, he cannot fail to know are intended for him. I have begged him to return and bravely face the charges brought against him, or at least to send me a line to say that he is well, but as yet my appeals have met with no response. The silence of the grave seems to have swallowed him up. Kathie, I am losing heart; I have almost ceased to hope that I shall ever see him again."

"Oh, papa!" cried Kathie, starting up in excitement. "Do not talk of giving up hope; we must find him and prove his innocence; we *must* bring the wretch who murdered Despard, and indirectly caused Laurie Despard's death, to justice, and make him suffer for his crimes. Oh, papa! papa! to think that *our* Gerald is skulking about the country in hourly danger of arrest, of being tried for his life. It is too dreadful! I cannot bear it!"

"Kathie," replied her father in a low tone, "the trouble has come to us and we must bear it bravely. I would have spared you, my darling, if I could; but it was impossible; you had to know it, and I thought it was best that you should hear it first from me. It is a sad home-coming for you, dear."

"Do not let that trouble you, dear papa. I am glad to be at home, very glad. I wish you had sent for me before; you must have been so lonely. We will bear our trouble together; and, perhaps, papa, these dark clouds will scatter soon, and the sun shine through again."

"Perhaps—God grant it! And now, Kathie, we will not talk any more. Your hands are frozen with the cold. Go to your room and rest and then come down to dinner and bring the children with you."

CHAPTER V.

FAREWELL FOR EVER.

KATHIE went up to her room feeling like one in a dream. She found it hard to believe that it was only that morning she had driven through the sunny, dewy meadows to the station. And was it possible that only three hours had passed since she bade Graham good-bye? Then, with the thought of Graham came the question—What would he say when he heard all? Would he not regret that he had chosen to link his fate with that of one upon whose name such disgrace had fallen? Graham, who was so proud and honourable, and who thought so much of his stainless name? But no, she felt sure that he would not believe, in spite of the evidence which was so strong against him, that *her* brother was a murderer and thief! He would hear all as soon as he reached London, and he would lose no time in coming down to Beechwood; he would not stay away from her in her trouble, she knew. Graham was wise and clever, and knew the world as she, a schoolgirl, could not, as her father, who had lived so long in seclusion, did not know it, and he would help them to find Gerald, he would suggest something that her father had not thought of; he would—in short, in Kathie's opinion, there was nothing that Graham could not do; and, such is the power of faith, that by the time she reached her room she felt greatly comforted. Her room was bright and warm, a cheery little fire burned on the hearth and sent its red rays playfully over the face and figure of the slight, fair girl of thirteen who knelt on the hearthrug. She sprang up when Kathie entered and threw her arms around her, exclaiming, "Oh, Kathie! I am so glad you have come; I've been waiting here for you hours and hours."

"I have been in the library with papa," answered Kathie, returning the embrace. "He had a great deal to say to me."

"I suppose he has been telling you about Gerald."

"What do you know about it?" asked Kathie in surprise, for her father had told her that the children had heard nothing of the matter.

"Oh, I know—not all that there is to know, I suppose," replied the child shrewdly, "but as much as nurse thought

fit to tell me. I knew that something dreadful had happened, and I was miserable and unhappy; so she told me that people said that Gerald had taken some of Mr. Blackwood's money, and afterwards pushed a man into the river and drowned him. How dare they say such things of him? I wonder they are not afraid of being struck dead, as the people in the Bible used to be when they told lies. I hate them, and I should like to take them—old Mr. Blackwood, too—and have them hanged; I should, Kathie, and if it's wicked to say so, I don't care."

Kathie kissed the excited little speaker, and soothed her as best she could; but it was some time before the flush faded from her face, and the angry sparkle in her eye gave place to a quieter expression.

"How are Sydney and Clive?" Kathie asked at length. "Are they well?"

"Yes, they are well; and Kathie, what do you think? I have been giving them lessons since Miss Rider left. Did you know that she was gone?"

"Yes; and have you been studying yourself as well as giving lessons?"

"Not much, only music; I have practised all day."

"I am afraid," said Kathie, shaking her head, "that you have not studied much if you have practised all day; you should not neglect your other studies for music, even though you love it best."

"No, I won't now that you are come; you are going to be our teacher now, aren't you, Kathie? I told nurse so, but she said that you would not, you would have something better to do. You would go into society, and most likely be married by-and-bye, she said; but you will not, will you?"

"I will never leave you and papa, dear Pearl, as long as you need me and want me," Kathie replied evasively.

"And that will be always. I don't know what we have done without you so long; it is so nice to have you at home again. Why, Kathie, there is the dinner bell, and you haven't taken off your hat!"

"Never mind, dear, don't wait for me. I will be down directly. Call the boys. Papa wants them to dine downstairs to-night."

"Oh, yes; we have dined with papa often lately; he said he was lonely and wanted us; but I don't think he did, much, for he never spoke to us once, and seemed almost angry when we talked. He just sat and and stared at Gerald's

portrait that hangs opposite, and looked so sad all the time."

"Poor, papa," said Kathie, her eyes filling. "He is in great trouble. You must not mind if he is a little impatient sometimes."

"Oh, I don't mind, at least I shall not now that you are come. I shall not mind anything now that you are here," and giving her sister an enthusiastic bear's hug, Pearl bounded away.

Dinner was a quiet meal, scarcely a word was spoken except by Kathie and the children, and the former noticed that ever and anon her father's gaze wandered to the opposite wall, where hung the portrait of her brother. It was painted in oils, and represented a young man of two or three-and-twenty, brilliantly and uncommonly handsome; the eyes were large, dark, and lustrous, the rich auburn hair waved back from a broad, noble brow, the rest of the features were perfectly shaped, but the chief charm was in the expression, which was singularly frank and winning. It was a face to be instinctively loved and trusted, a face which it was impossible to associate with meanness or fraud; and Kathie wondered more and more as she gazed at it with overflowing eyes how anyone could suspect Gerald of a base deliberate crime. A rash, fierce act he might commit in a moment of anger, for he was both proud and passionate, but of a long-meditated and deliberately-carried-out deed of dishonesty he was incapable; and the thought that he, the brother she had always so loved and looked up to, was wandering about penniless and, perhaps, suffering privations and hunger, effectually took Kathie's appetite away. Immediately after dinner Mr. Milner went back to the library, and the children carried Kathie off upstairs. The boys were as rapturously glad to have their sister back again as Pearl was, and, in talking to them and asking questions about their lessons and games, Kathie half forgot for the time the terrible story she had just heard. Pearl was soon seated at her beloved piano, and Kathie thought nothing could be sweeter than the old hymn tunes which the little girl played so sweetly and, expressively, and which Sydney sang in his clear, high voice. They were a pretty, home-like group as they gathered around the piano in the pleasant, bright school-room. The Milners were all alike; they all had the same wavy pale-gold hair, dark-lashed hazel eyes, and straight, delicate features, except where in Gerald and

Sydney they deepened into a richer, warmer beauty. Before long Kathie's voice dropped out of the singing and her thoughts wandered away. She felt more keenly than ever her responsibility with regard to the children. They were now so innocent and happy. Would they remain so? Had she strength and wisdom to guide and train them, and help them on the upward path—she who felt so much in need of guidance herself? Might she not, while earnestly desiring to do right, sometimes make fatal mistakes? Could she, whose temper was so proud and easily roused, teach them to control theirs? For help in such matters Kathie never dreamed of looking to her father. Mr. Milner had always been more prone to allow himself to be led than to lead others. As long as his wife lived she had been the guiding, controlling spirit; and when she died, Gerald, though scarcely more than a child, had taken her place. Not that Mr. Milner was weak-minded, for weak in the common acceptation of the term he certainly was not; but he lacked that power or faculty, or whatever it is, which makes one man naturally and almost unconsciously take the lead, while another just as inevitably falls into the background. From him, therefore, she could not expect the help she knew she would need, and to the best source—the only true source of help and comfort—poor Kathie had not yet learned to look. But in the midst of her fears, doubts, and forebodings, came the cheering thought that Graham's mother would help her. To her she could go for counsel in the difficulties which she foresaw would arise in the future, and her courage rose once more.

"Are you tired, Kathie?" asked Pearl, suddenly catching sight of her grave face; "shall we leave off singing?"

"I am a little tired to-night, and I think it must be long past these boys' bedtime. Suppose we sing one more hymn and then say good-night?"

"Let's sing 'Home, Sweet Home.' We always used to finish up with that when Miss Rider was here; she liked it, it always made her cry."

"Not 'Home, Sweet Home,'" cried Kathie eagerly, her thoughts flying to poor, homeless Gerald; "sing something else."

"It's not a hymn either," said Clive, "and I don't like it."

"You choose one then, Clive," said Kathie, drawing the little boy towards her. "We will sing whatever Clive wants us to."

"I like 'Thy will be done,'" said the child shyly; "it is best of all."

They sang it through to the end, and Kathie felt, for the first time in her life, some dim understanding of the depth of faith and love which would be necessary before those words could be sung truly and from the heart.

Kathie slept very ill that night, in spite of her weariness: grief and excitement kept her awake. For hours she lay watching the silvery moonbeams that stole across the floor and up the wall, wondering in a vague, half unconscious way if those same moonbeams were shining upon poor Laurie Despard's grave. When at last she did fall asleep, it was only to wake in trembling terror from a horrid dream, that Gerald was flying along a dark, narrow road, pursued by two fierce-looking men, and that, at last, finding them gaining upon him and that it was impossible to evade them, he sprang with a cry of despair into a deep river that rushed, black and foaming, across his path. This terrifying dream, and the thoughts it evoked, effectually banished sleep, and with that wild cry still ringing in her ears Kathie sprang up and began to dress. She felt as if she could not stay in the room, as if she must hurry outside where the cold, sharp morning air could blow about her and drive away the sick terror which had taken possession of her. It was very early; the morning star still shone in the purplish grey sky; the first faint rosy flushes were just beginning to tinge the eastern horizon. Not a sound broke the stillness save the low, subdued twitter of waking birds in the half-bare branches overhead, and the peace, the holy, restful hush of all nature acted like balm upon Kathie's agitated spirits; it soothed and quieted her, and the haunting fears which the long wakeful hours, and still more her horrid dream, had conjured up, fled she knew not whither.

Beechwood Hall was always beautiful, but it looked more fair and picturesque this morning, Kathie thought, than she had ever seen it, and after walking some distance she sat down under a great tree and gazed with loving eyes at the old house as it stood amidst the clustering autumn-browned trees, with its tall, red chimneys rising here and there above the branches, its old-fashioned windows wreathed with ivy, and its mingled air of stately seclusion and happy English comfort. But she could not stay there long, for memories of happy holidays when Gerald had been with her crowded thick and fast upon her; down the long avenue they had

ridden so often together, under those trees he had made a swing for her; by the little stream, whose murmuring sound came so clearly to her, how many a bright afternoon had been spent in fishing! Kathie could not stand it. She sprang up and hurried away. She walked about the gardens for awhile, gathering abstractedly the great white chrysanthemums which bloomed in great profusion and covered the damp paths with their pearly petals; then she wandered to the top of a hill where in her childish days she had often gone on nutting expeditions with Gerald, and looked down on the little hamlet which lay below. It had once been a part of the Milner estate, which had then stretched away almost as far as she could see, but that was long ago, in her great grandfather's time, before he had by gambling and riotous living wasted his substance and contracted debts, to liquidate which he had been forced to part with some of his fairest farms and cut down the magnificent oaks which had clothed the slope above which she stood, and had left a mortgaged estate to his son, who in his turn had transmitted it to his son, Kathie's father, still more heavily encumbered.

Mr. Milner had never been able to pay off the mortgage, and it was with difficulty that he had of late years managed to pay the heavy interest. He, however, was looking for a turn in fortune's wheel, in the shape of the favourable termination of a law suit in which he had been for some time engaged. If it was decided in his favour, he would come into possession of a sum of money sufficient to enable him to pay off the mortgage, and to double his annual income. Morally he was entitled to the money. It remained to be seen whether he were also legally entitled to it.

The sun had risen, and the thin columns of smoke which rose from the cottage chimneys, and the various sounds which were wafted up to her, told Kathie that the village was awake, and that the villagers were beginning to be busy about their daily toil. At the upper end of the village stood a little Gothic church, with wreaths of ivy clinging round its graceful peaks and spires. Acting on a sudden irresistible impulse, Kathie sprang up from the fallen tree on which she had been seated, and, making her way down the steep path between the slender young oaks which had sprung up in the place of their venerable forefathers, she crossed the bridge that spanned the little stream, opened the gate leading into the churchyard, and very soon she was

standing beside her mother's grave. Upon it lay a withered bunch of flowers, placed there, she knew, by Pearl on the preceding Sunday. She wondered if her mother was looking down upon all her dear ones and knew of the shame and sorrow which had fallen upon her best-loved child. "But no," said Kathie, half aloud, "those who have entered into rest cannot know all that happens here on earth; there could not be perfect peace and joy in heaven if those who are there could look down and see all the sorrow, pain, and sad mistakes of those they love." From her mother's grave she went to another—one that had not been there a year ago. It was that of the rector's wife—the good, motherly woman whom Kathie had liked so well.

Beside the grave were three smaller ones, which all bore the same date of month and year, the rector's children who had sickened and died, one after another, of the same fever which had carried off their mother.

"How strange it seems," thought Kathie, "that those who are needed most and loved the best should be taken. Mrs. Grey was the rector's right hand in parish matters, so gentle and useful and good, and so really and truly a Christian, and she is taken while others who seem of no real use in the world—I, for instance—are left. And yet how bravely Mr. Grey bears his great loss. He is not strong; he is poor; his wife and children were all he had, and he can give them up without a murmur. I cannot understand it. There must be more in religion than I have ever found, for he says that it is faith in God which enables him to resign his loved ones so calmly and confidently into His hands. He says he can say with Job, 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' I could not say that, much less feel it, if papa were to die, or Graham, or any of my dear ones; I could not bear it; I could not think that it was well. I cannot feel now that all is ordered for the best. I cannot feel resigned and submissive when I think of Gerald—my dear, innocent Gerald—lying under such a ban, suffering such pain and shame. How can it be for the best?"

Kathie left some of her chrysanthemums on her mother's, some on Mrs. Grey's, grave; then, sitting down on one of the grey stone steps of the church, she gave herself up to her sad thoughts. Suddenly there came out on the crisp still air a sweet rich strain of music, which told Kathie that she was not the only one who had chosen to visit the

church thus early and alone. High and grand the music rose and swelled, and sank and rose again, till all the air was filled with lofty, soul-inspiring melody. It was so pure, so high, so free from every taint of earth, that it fell on Kathie's heart like dew from heaven, and the impatient, bitter, rebellious feelings in which, a few minutes before, she had been indulging, were charmed away, to be replaced by gentler, holier feelings; and before the last sweet strains had ceased she felt calmer and stronger than she had done since she had been told all that terrible story, consequently better prepared for the fresh trouble which was awaiting her.

Kathie had lingered longer than she intended; it was late when she reached home, and they were waiting breakfast for her.

Like dinner the night before, it was a very silent meal. Just as they were rising from the table old Roger carried in the post bag. With hands that visibly trembled, Mr. Milner opened it and took out his letters. The writing he longed to see was not there, and with a deep sigh he gathered them up and went out, saying as he left the room:

"There is nothing for you, Kathie."

Half an hour later, when she and Pearl were in the drawing-room arranging in several great china bowls the bunches of chrysanthemums and bright-coloured autumn leaves they had been gathering, he came to the door and silently beckoned to Kathie. She followed him out, guessing from his face that some fresh trouble had fallen upon them. He led the way into the garden, and sank down upon one of the seats as if he had not strength to stand.

"What is it, papa?" she asked; then, catching sight of the letter, which he clutched rather than held in his hand she exclaimed, "Oh, papa! it is from Gerald. Is he—where is he?"

"Where is he?" repeated Mr. Milner in a half-distracted tone, "I do not know. Oh, Kathie! the worst that could happen has happened to us now."

"Papa! he is not—they have not taken him?"

"No, not that; but oh, Kathie, he did it."

Kathie sprang to her feet. her face perfectly colourless.

"Papa, don't say so, don't; Gerald did it, never, never."

"He did, Kathie. It is as Blackwood suspected. Despard accused him of the forgery and theft of the notes, Gerald ordered him to retract his words and struck him, and in the

struggle that ensued Despard missed his footing and fell into the river. Gerald tried to save him, but he could not; he was carried down by the rapid current and drowned."

Kathie felt as if the foundations of the earth were trembling beneath her feet. Gerald was guilty after all. The death of a fellow-creature lay at his door—the death of the man he had called his friend. And she had trusted him so completely; she would have believed in him if the whole world had accused him, and after all he was guilty! A feeling of burning indignation rose in her heart against him as she looked at her father sitting with bent head, heart-broken, humiliated, suffering so intensely, all through his rash act. Why could he not have controlled his fiery temper and treated with the contempt it deserved the foul calumny? Why had he brought such shame and sorrow upon them all? But this feeling was succeeded by one of passionate pity. What was their suffering compared with his? How terrible must be his anguish and remorse!

"From where did he write?" she asked at length.

"From Southampton. He has left England, Kathie; gone for ever, ruined and disgraced; gone—and I know not where. Read it for yourself."

Kathie took the letter and read it through with tear-blinded eyes. Every line—every word spoke the anguish of the writer's heart—his burden of horror and remorse; his deep grief for the sorrow he had brought upon those he loved. There was not one word of self-pity, not one single excuse for what he had done. It was the simple, heart-broken cry, "Father, I have sinned!" In conclusion he wrote: "I do not ask you to forgive me—I dare not—I have sinned too deeply. I have brought shame upon the name you have always borne so stainlessly; it is my name no longer. Try to think of me as if I had died (would to heaven I had long ago), and forget me if you can. I sail from England in an hour; by the time you receive this I shall be hundreds of miles away. I have committed Cain's crime, and, like Cain, I must be a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth. I have taken a life—the life of the man who was my friend—and the horror of it will haunt me till I die. Good-bye dear, dear father, we shall never meet again! Let me thank you now a thousand times for all your love and goodness to me, which, alas! I have repaid by bringing shame and sorrow upon you. I have no right to ask your forgiveness, but I feel that I must. For-

give me, father, and pity me if you can; for in all the world there is not a more wretched man than I. Give my love to Kathie—poor Kathie!—my crime has darkened her life too, just when it should be brightest; and kiss the children for me. Once more, good-bye, dear father; forget, if you can, your unhappy son, Gerald."

"Yes, he has gone, and he will never be able to return—never dare to show himself in England again. Gone with a weight upon his conscience which nothing on earth can ever lift; his whole life ruined and blighted at the very outset;" and, like David of old, the stricken father lifted up his voice crying, "Oh, my son, my son, would that I had died for thee!"

"Papa, darling," pleaded Kathie, "do not grieve so; let us think what we had better do."

"Do?" he repeated impatiently; "there is nothing to be done. While Gerald was in England, and I believed him guiltless, I would have moved Heaven and earth to prove his innocence, and deliver the real murderer up to justice. But Kathie he is not innocent; and he has gone."

"He is innocent of the theft, papa, and he is not a murderer in the sight of heaven, for he was innocent of any intention to take Despard's life."

"Who will believe that, Kathie?"

"*We know it*, papa, and we must find out where Gerald is gone."

"How can we find out?"

"Can we not find out what ships left Southampton on the day he wrote, and obtain a list of their passengers ——"

"Do you not understand, Kathie, that he has sailed under an assumed name?"

"Of course, papa; he could not do otherwise, but it seems to me—it is foolish, perhaps—but I think among the list of names I should be able to guess which was the one Gerald had chosen."

She hastily turned the letter over to read the date, but it bore none, then she found the envelope and examined that; but it gave her no clue, for the letter, though written in Southampton, had been posted in London, and they had no means of guessing how long after it was written it had been posted.

"It is of no use," said Mr. Milner, with a gesture of despair. "We have no clue and we can obtain none."

"Do not give up so easily, dear papa," said Kathie.

"Gerald has some friend in London who addressed and posted this letter for him, we must find him."

"Find him! Kathie, you talk like a child. How can we find him? Shall we advertise for the man who aided the escape of Gerald Milner, the thief and murderer?"

"No, but Gerald often went to London on business for the firm, might not Mr. Blackwood be able to tell you whom he visited there?"

"I do not know, but I shall not ask him. It is all of no use, Kathie."

Kathie felt almost angry with her father for being so hopeless, and she resolved to find out Gerald's friend. Of herself and against her father's wish she could, of course, do nothing; but Graham could do it for her; he might come to-morrow, or even to-day, and he would help them, she knew. She began to long for him most earnestly, not alone for the assistance he would be able to render, but because his very presence would be a rest. He was so strong and quiet, nothing ever seemed to agitate him, no difficulty dismayed him, and despair and impossibility were words which had no place in his vocabulary.

"You have another letter, papa," she said at length. "What is it?"

"I should say it was ruin, if ruin had not already overtaken us—the law suit has been decided in Mortimer's favour."

"Oh, papa! But he has no right to the money, it is yours."

"Morally, yes; not legally it seems; at any rate he has the money now, and we have nothing to look forward to in the future but sordid, pinching economy."

"Shall we be worse off than we have been hitherto?"

"Yes, for I owe a great deal of money which I shall have to pay at once. My creditors have been very patient, but they will be so no longer; the instant it becomes known that the suit is lost the bills will pour in upon me."

"And how will you pay them, papa?"

"There is but one way, Kathie; I must sell Beechwood. There was a time when I should have thought that, to be forced to sell the home which has been in our family for nearly three centuries would be the greatest sorrow and humiliation that could befall us, but now it seems to me nothing by comparison with this other sorrow; nothing matters now."

Kathie was inclined to take the same dreary view of the case, and yet she knew that to leave the old home would be a heavy grief to her father and herself, a grief which no greater one would render less bitter.

CHAPTER VI.

SUMMER-DAY FRIENDS.

THE shadows seemed to fall more darkly over Beechwood as the days passed. Mr. Milner shut himself up in the library, and was seldom seen except at meal times. Kathie occupied herself as much as possible with the children, and the rest of the time she spent wandering about the grounds and gardens. More and more passionately she longed for Graham's presence as the time went on, and with the longing there began to mingle a growing wonder that he did not come, or at least write, for he must know by this time what trouble had come upon her. But perhaps his stern, exacting uncle was ill and he could not leave him. That he would come if he could she never doubted. At first Kathie was too much absorbed in her sorrow to notice their neglect, but by-and-bye she began to wonder why, of all the ladies who had always called on her when she returned home for her holidays, only Mrs. Clitheroe, the doctor's wife, had paid her a visit, now that she had come home for good. But she was far too simple-hearted to guess the reason; she never imagined that the people who had known her all her life, and professed to care for her, would consider her unworthy of their friendship now that shame and sorrow had come upon her and her's, and that poverty and obscurity were likely to be her portion in the future. A rude awakening was in store for her. One dull grey afternoon she was feeling particularly sad and depressed; her father had ordered his horse immediately after luncheon and gone for a ride over the estate which was so soon to pass out of his hands for ever. Pearl had gone to play with her little friend Nellie Clitheroe; the boys were amusing themselves with a football in a corner of the orchard, and she was all alone. After trying to read, and finding that she could not become interested in her book, she rang the bell and ordered the carriage.

"I must speak to some one," she said to herself as she

dressed for her drive, "I will go to the Laurels; Mrs. Osborne will be glad to see me, I know. I wonder she has not called, but I suppose some of the children are unwell again."

"Drive to the Laurels, Roger," she said, as she took her seat in the carriage.

"To the Laurels, did ye say, Miss Kathie?" asked the old man, as if he thought he had not heard aright.

"Yes, to Mrs. Osborne's."

Roger looked for a minute as if he were about to speak, but changing his mind, he pursed up his lips, and drove off in silence, with as grim an expression as his pleasant, good-natured countenance could wear.

Mrs. Osborne, of the Laurels, was a lady who had always professed a warm affection for "poor, little, motherless Kathie Milner," and the latter had never returned home for her holidays but she had called at Beechwood at once, and insisted upon her spending part of the time at the Laurels; she had inaugurated little parties and picnics in her honour, and, to use a common expression, had "made much of her." Kathie therefore felt sure of a welcome, and a very warm one, at the Laurels.

Several ladies were seated in the drawing-room when Kathie was shown in. They ceased speaking the instant she entered, in so sudden and marked a manner as to make her feel certain that she had been the subject of conversation. The uncomfortable colour mounted to her cheeks and burned there hotly as she made her way across the large room to Mrs. Osborne. The lady rose slowly from her chair and held out one ringed hand. Her languid "Very glad to see you, Kathie," was so different from the warm embrace and cordial welcome she had been accustomed to receive, that poor Kathie could scarcely believe the evidence of her own senses. She was at no loss, however, to account for the change; Mrs. Osborne had only been a summer-day friend, and had ceased to care for her the moment her sun of worldly prosperity had set, and the cloud of shame and probable poverty had covered her sky. It required all the girl's self-command to keep back the tears that rushed into her eyes, and to answer calmly her quandom friend's languidly-polite remarks. It was the first time in her life that she ever remembered to have been slighted, and the experience was as bitter as it was new to her. Her hot Milner blood boiled with indignation and passionate resent-

ment at the unjust treatment she was receiving. If Gerald were guilty of all and more than they accused him of, she was innocent, and as worthy of Mrs. Osborne's friendship as she had been three months ago, when she had kissed and caressed her and called her her "dear girl," and her "darling child," quite as worthy, and far more in need of her friendship than she had been then.

A very short call Kathie made of it, and her farewells were as coldly spoken, her bow haughtier than Mrs. Osborne's own as she left the room. But as soon as she was safely out of the house and seated in the carriage, the pride which had sustained her gave way, and leaning her head on the cushions she burst into a flood of such bitter tears as never in her life she had shed before. All the bitterness and sorrow of the past few weeks seemed to rush over her all at once, and completely break down her barriers of self-control. Indignation at the slight she had received, sorrow for Gerald, anxiety as to the cause of Graham's absence and strange silence, together with suspense and fear and passionate longing for the old happy days that were gone for ever, quite overmastered her, and for a long time she sobbed unrestrainedly. Kathie was new to trouble, and very impatient of it. At the post-office she caused Roger to stop and inquire for letters. Graham must have written at last, she told herself, and his letter was waiting for her. All the more now that her childhood's friend had forsaken her she longed to hear from him, though as yet no doubt of his truth and constancy had crossed her mind, she longed to know the reason of his silence, and to hear from himself the cause of his continued absence when she needed him so much. But there was no letter, and her spirits sank down to zero during the remainder of the long cold drive.

Was it possible that Graham was ill. Surely nothing short of physical inability would prevent his writing. If Graham were in trouble, she told herself, nothing in the world would prevent her writing to him and assuring him of her love and sympathy. Perhaps, after all, he did not really care for her, perhaps the trouble, which should have made him hasten to her side, had only estranged him. But this last thought she indignantly spurned as unworthy of herself and him, though perhaps it had something to do with altering her determination to write to him at once and enquire the reason of his silence.

Mr. Milner was standing in the hall when Kathie alighted

from the carriage, and with a slow, weary step, which plainly betokened a heavy heart, went up the steps. He was not usually very quick to notice the expression of the faces about him, but he could not fail to be struck with her pale face and listless, weary air, and he was shocked at the change a few short weeks had wrought in her.

"My poor girl," he said sadly, taking her cold hands in his, "how ill you look. What is troubling you more than usual, Kathie?"

"Nothing, papa, nothing, at least, that ought to trouble me;" but she could not keep the tremor out of her voice, nor prevent the hot indignant tears filling her eyes once more.

"Where have you been?" he asked sternly, but the sternness was not meant for her, Kathie knew.

"To Mrs. Osborne's, papa."

"I am very sorry you went there. I could have spared you that humiliation, dear, if I had known you were going."

"I thought I was sure of a warm welcome, she always professed——"

"Professed," her father repeated bitterly, "so did a good many others whose professions were equally sincere. Do you not realise, Kathie, that we have been sent to Coventry? The very first to withdraw their friendship were Colonel and Mrs. Osborne; but we need not grieve for such summer-day friends; those whom we value most have remained true to us—Mr. Grey, the Clitheroes, and Sir John Lorton, are more our friends than ever before."

"Yes, Mrs. Clitheroe has been very kind, but it is hard to find myself deceived in Mrs. Osborne. I have always loved her, and I thought she really cared for me and for all of us."

"No doubt you would never have had occasion to think otherwise if you had remained happy and prosperous. It is a hard lesson, Kathie, and almost as new to me as it is to you; but we must bear it, darling, and remember that the friendship of such people is not worth having."

This was doubtless true, but the knowledge brought no comfort with it.

The slow, cold days passed on, the autumn wore away, and still Graham neither came nor wrote, and the unwelcome, bitter, humiliating thought forced itself upon Kathie's unwilling heart and mind—Graham's love had been no more sincere than Mrs. Osborne's, but, with the first breath of

sorrow and adversity that had come upon her, had died an easy death. Graham Keith, the heir of Colonel Keith, of Home Woods, could not afford to ally himself with a family disgraced, ruined, ostracised, as was hers. Kathie did not accept this explanation all at once, on the contrary she refused to believe it as long as she could. She told herself over and over again that such base suspicions, such insulting doubts of Graham, only proved her own unworthiness; tried to persuade herself that illness, either his own or his uncle's, kept him away; that his silence would be satisfactorily explained when he came; but, in spite of herself, these doubts and suspicions would arise, and one day happening to take up an old newspaper she read the announcement of Colonel Keith's death, and in a list of "wills and bequests" in the same paper she saw that Dr. Graham Keith had succeeded to his large property. She could deceive herself no longer, Graham was remaining away of his own accord. His uncle was not keeping him away. He was his own master, and could have come to her if he had wished; and all the time she had been looking and longing for him he had doubtless been congratulating himself that his engagement to her had never been made public, and that he could withdraw from it without any odium. To one as proud and high-spirited as Kathie Milner this discovery was fraught with keenest humiliation, and she despised herself because she could not at once learn to hate and despise him as he deserved, and cast all memory of him out of her heart; because her thoughts would revert to the old happy days when she had first learned that he cared for her, and deemed herself so rich in his love, for, in spite of his unworthiness, she loved him still. She had not lightly given the first, best love of her strong, proud heart to Graham Keith, and she could not lightly take it away, and it was a daily pain and shame to her that she could not.

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN FROM THE CAPE.

"KATHIE," began Mr. Milner one evening as they were seated together before the library fire, "should you mind leaving England very much?"

Kathie had been expecting this question for some time,

she knew that her father would not care to remain in England after what had happened.

"No, papa," she answered, after a moment's hesitation. "I should not mind much. Are you thinking of leaving England?"

"Yes, Kathie: we are ruined—socially and financially; we can never hold up our heads in England again."

"Financially, papa? Will not the sale of Beechwood bring us in a tolerably large sum?"

"I do not know what you mean by 'tolerably' large. Beechwood is mortgaged to considerably more than half its value, and its value, as you know, is not what it used to be. We have been obliged from time to time to part with our best lands and farms, and most of the houses are out of repair. Altogether I expect to realise very little by the sale. My debts, too, are considerable. If I had not been so sure of a favourable termination to that miserable law suit I should have scrupled to contract them; but, as it was, I did not doubt that in a little while I should be able to pay all I owed."

"How much will you have when the mortgage has been paid off, and all the debts settled?"

"I do not know exactly, but I suppose enough to buy a pleasant home at the Cape and to furnish it comfortably."

"The Cape, papa? The Cape of Good Hope? You do not think of going there?" exclaimed Kathie in amazement."

"And why not?"

"It is so far, papa; and what should we do there?"

"We should do as well there as anywhere else, I imagine. Where did you think we should go then when we left England?"

"I thought, perhaps, some quiet town in France or Germany, where we could live cheaply."

"No, that would not suit me at all," said Mr. Milner decisively. "I am too well known there, and I should not care for the children to grow up among foreigners, and in the course of time forget their own country. I have many reasons for choosing the Cape in preference to any other country."

"Will you tell them to me, papa?"

"I mean to do so; but first, do you ever remember to have heard me speak of my old friend, Ambrose Hildyard?"

"I can't remember. I do not think I have."

"Very probably not, for it is many years since he left England—more than twenty-five years, I think—and I have never seen him since. We corresponded for a time; but as years went on our mutual interests grew fewer, each formed new ties, and our letters grew less frequent, and at last ceased altogether. He has done wonderfully well at the Cape, is a member of the Colonial Parliament, I believe, and very rich."

"You have heard from him lately again, papa."

"Yes, Kathie, while our trouble has estranged some of our friends, it has drawn others nearer to us. Ambrose Hildyard is one of the latter. He has heard all, and guessing, I suppose, that I would not care to stay in England after what has occurred, has written advising me to go out to the Cape. He is sure that the climate will suit us and that we shall like colonial life. He further says that if I wish he can obtain for me an appointment under government, which will bring us in a tolerable income. So you see I have one very good reason for wishing to go to South Africa."

"Yes; it is very kind of Mr. Hildyard."

"Very; but that is not my only reason, it is a long way off and we are unknown there. No one will be likely to associate us with the Milner whose name has been in all the newspapers. The climate will suit Clive's delicate lungs and chest better than any other, Clitheroe tells me, and"—bringing out his strongest reason last—"I think it is there that Gerald has gone."

"Have you any reason for thinking so, papa?"

"No reason exactly, but I fancy so. You remember what an interest he always took in South Africa, even as a boy; how he studied its history, geography, and politics; how interested he always was in stories of its peoples and its free, untrammelled life; and I think that when hunted and driven from his own country he would go there."

This idea had more than once crossed Kathie's own mind, but she had never mentioned it to her father, and was surprised to find that all the time he had entertained the same thought.

"Shall you mind going very much, Kathie? Will it break your heart to sever all the old ties and leave England for ever?" Mr. Milner asked presently.

"Are not all the old ties severed already?" Kathie asked herself bitterly; aloud she said, "I shall be glad to go away, papa, the sooner the better; and as for our friends

they have shown us very plainly that they will not miss us."

"Some of them, not all. There are some who will miss us, and be sorry to see the old place in the hands of strangers."

Kathie heaved a little sigh. It was hard to think of strangers owning Beechwood, the dear old home that had belonged to the Milners so long.

"When do you think of leaving?" she asked.

"As soon as possible after the place is sold. I am very anxious to go soon. The longer we delay the less chance there will be of finding Gerald."

"I am afraid there is little chance of that in any case," she replied sadly. "You could not find him here, and think how much less easy it will be to find him there."

"On account of the greater extent of the country do you mean?"

"Why yes, papa, and the fact that we know nothing about it. Just think if we were in Cape Town, and Gerald in Kimberley or Durban we should be to all intents and purposes as far from him as we are now."

"I do not agree with you. We shall be in the same country at any rate; the ocean will not separate us. Once there I shall leave no stone unturned to find him, and search and inquiry can be conducted there with far less risk than here, where I was afraid the most cautiously-worded advertisements would excite suspicion, and, Kathie, he may join us too of his own accord when we are there. He is personally unknown, and we might all live together without any one suspecting that he was my own son. That is my plan, Kathie, that is my hope; I cannot live without my boy."

It was a hope that would not be realised, Kathie feared. Gerald might have gone out to South Africa—she fancied he had—but what then? He would not be likely to remain in Cape Town or any other seaport, where people from England were constantly arriving, and where he would be in daily danger of recognition. He would probably go at once into the interior of the country, where he might be for years without even becoming aware that they had left England. It was five weeks since he had sailed, he must already have reached the Cape. Where might he not be by the time they arrived there? But of this she said nothing to her father; if he were hopeful she would not say one

word to make him despond. They sat long talking over the pros and cons of the matter, and when they separated for the night it had been decided that immediate preparations should be begun for the voyage to the Cape.

"I forgot to tell you," said Mr. Milner, as Kathie was leaving the room, "that my old friend's son is at present in England on a visit; he leaves early in the new year. I think I shall ask him to spend the remainder of his time with us, and if we are ready in time we might sail when he does. You have no objection, I suppose—to his coming here, I mean."

If Kathie had consulted her own wishes she would have said that she had a very decided objection to the proposed visit. She felt that the last few weeks spent in the old home would be very painful ones to them all, and she would have preferred that they should be free from the restraint of a stranger's presence; but Kathie was not accustomed to consult her own inclinations when they were opposed to her father's wishes, and she did not do so on the present occasion. She hoped, however, that the invitation would be declined.

There was an outcry of sorrow and dismay from all the servants when Mr. Milner's intention of leaving England became known; most of them had served the family for years, and they thought it very hard when Mr. Milner refused to allow any of them to accompany him. The old nurse felt especially aggrieved. She entered Kathie's room one day, and, with a burst of tears, entreated her to ask her father to alter his decision.

"Haven't I served you faithfully, Miss Kathie?" she asked. "Wasn't I Master Gerald's nurse and yours? It'll break my heart if you cast me off now."

"We are not casting you off, dear nurse, you must not say so," said Kathie gently. "But can you not understand that we are going to live in a very different style from that to which we have been accustomed? We shall not keep many servants, I imagine, and those that we do keep will very probably be black. You would not like their ways, nurse, I know, and you would be unhappy and wish yourself home again."

"No, Miss Kathie, I wouldn't. I'd be willing to take half the wages I receive now and do twice as much work. I'd serve you better than a dozen black savages. Who loves the children better than I do? Who understands them so

well? If they must go to the ends of earth, why can't I go to watch over them?"

"Do not papa and I love them? And who do you suppose will watch over them more tenderly than I?"

"I know you will, Miss Kathie dear," replied the old woman, with a fresh burst of tears. "I know you are good and wise and sensible enough for twice your age; but it's not fitting that Miss Milner of Beechwood Hall should turn herself into a nursemaid; you've turned yourself into a schoolmistress already. What would your poor mother say?"

"She would tell me to do my duty bravely, nurse; and you forget that in a little while I shall be Miss Milner of Beechwood no longer. There can be nothing derogatory to my dignity in teaching and caring for my own little brothers and sister."

"But, Miss Kathie, they won't always have you. You'll be getting married, and who'll look after them then?"

Kathie smiled into the old woman's tearful eyes as she replied:

"You may dismiss your fears on that score, dear nurse; I shall never be married. Papa and the children need me, and I will never leave them."

"No, you'll never get a husband good enough for you in that outlandish place," sobbed nurse, finding a fresh cause for grief in this dismal reflection. "And who'd ever ha' thought of *your* being an old maid? It breaks my heart to think of it."

"Don't think of it then, nurse," said Kathie, smiling in spite of herself. "Think of something else; try and think of the long letters I shall write to you; think of how much stronger and better Clive will grow in that warm, sunny climate. Do not imagine, dear nurse," she added kindly, "that we are not very sorry to leave you behind, or that we shall not miss you, for we shall very much; but I know you could not accommodate yourself to the ways of a new country at your time of life. You could not be happy out of England, I know."

But in spite of this Kathie asked her father to allow old nurse to accompany them to their new home. Mr. Milner, however, was firm in his resolve to take none of the servants with him.

"I am sorry for poor nurse," he said; "I dare say she feels heartbroken at the prospect of being parted from the

children, but we cannot take her. The fewer who know us and our story the better. If Gerald comes to live with us in the character of a distant relative the secret will be better kept if no one shares it with us." And from this decision he was not to be moved.

Kathie spent most of her time walking or riding over the estate, bidding long, silent farewells to all the loved spots hallowed by so many memories, endeared by so many tender associations. Those chill autumn days were the darkest she had ever known; the very air seemed to be heavy with unspoken farewells and the pain of parting with what she had loved all her life. Her heart grew heavier every day; the present was so bitter with humiliation and disappointment, and Kathie looked for nothing in the future but a long exile, which would most likely last for ever; and the hope which her father had of meeting Gerald she did not share. In his presence she tried to be bright and cheerful, but when alone the dark, sad thoughts would crowd aronnd her and refuse to be driven away. The contrast between the unhappy present and the fair, untroubled past was sometimes very hard to bear. The sorrow, too, of finding that which she had loved best and trusted most unworthy of her love and trust was hers, and what sorrow is harder to bear? What leaves a keener sting, a more aching regret? This sorrow, I suppose, comes to every one sooner or later, and the more perfect the trust, the more unselfish the love we bestow, the sharper the anguish of finding the idols we have set up crumble to pieces. It is the proudest and most reserved natures, I think, who are the most prone to idealise and apotheosise the commonplace mortals among whom they live; and it is those natures which are the least easy to disillusionise, and to whom the truth when learned gives the keenest pain. With this trouble Kathie fought bravely, and in a measure successfully; but often, when she thought the struggle was over and she had conquered, she would find that it had to be begun all over again and fought afresh. It was well for her that she had not time to be much alone; her father and the children made many demands upon her, and she was obliged to occupy herself with others. Had it not been so she might have grown hard and bitter. As it was she grew every day graver and quieter, and less and less like the bright, sunny Kathie who had been the life of Miss Burnley's school. Returning late one afternoon from a long, cold,

lonely ride, she found old Roger unsaddling a horse which was a stranger to her.

"Is any one here?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Kathie, a young gentleman has just arrived."

"Who is he?" she asked, her heart giving a sudden bound for which she hated herself the next moment.

"I think his name is Elliot; it's the young gentleman from foreign parts, Miss Kathie, that the master's been expecting."

"Mr. Hildyard, has he arrived?"

"Yes, and would you believe it, miss, he ain't a bit like a foreigner. I'd never ha' dreamed he wasn't a Englishman if he hadn't ha' told me so himself."

"But he is an Englishman, Roger, as much an Englishman as you are; his father is an English gentleman and a friend of papa's."

"That may be, Miss Kathie, his father may be English right enough, but I can't think that a young fellow born and bred where he's been—I don't rightly know whether it's Australy or New Zealand, but it's one o' them dark corners o' the earth that the parson prays for now and then—I can't think of him as a out-and-out Englishman, no, no."

"Why! Roger, do you not think that Master Sydney will be an out-and-out Englishman if he grows up in the Cape Colony?"

"Yes, Miss Kathie, I do; but you see he's English born, and that makes all the difference. A man as hasn't had the advantage o' being born in England, can't have a real, bold, English heart in him, I'm sure." And Roger looked so convinced that this was unanswerable, that Kathie gave up the argument. Half an hour later, as she went down to the drawing-room, she caught sight, through the half-open door, of the guest, and she almost smiled to herself at the epithet of "foreigner" which Roger had bestowed upon him (he was standing with his back to the fire, talking to Mr. Milner, who sat in a low chair near the hearth), and there was something unmistakably English in his attitude and appearance.

He possessed none of Gerald's warm, brilliant beauty, nothing of Dr. Keith's patrician, *distingué* air; but he was handsome and very pleasant looking, nevertheless. Kathie saw a tall, athletic figure, clear, smiling, blue-grey eyes, a complexion naturally fair, but browned by a more ardent sun than that of England to a deep, healthy shade of tan.

Before the evening was half over, Kathie decided that the unwelcome guest was a far pleasanter person than any she had met for some time.

Ambrose Hildyard was gentlemanly and polished, but with nothing of conventionality about him; every word and action bespoke energy and self-reliance. There was about him a manly independence, mingled with a boyish ingenuousness and an almost feminine softness of manner, which were extremely attractive.

The conversation during dinner and afterwards ran naturally upon the country which young Hildyard had lately left and to which they were so soon going, and there were many questions to ask and answer; and to answer questions about his native land, which he evidently regarded as the finest and happiest in the world, was a plesant task to him. He talked to Mr. Milner of its politics, statistics, its history past and present; he drew for Kathie brilliant word-pictures of its wooded hills, its shadowy, ferny kloofs, its gorgeous birds and flowers, its many peoples, with their histories, traditions, and strange beliefs, and for the children he related adventures he had had with buffaloes and elephants in the forests of Knysna, with lions in the Transvaal, and with Zulus and serpents in Natal; and whatever was the subject he discussed it with an animation, earnestness, and entire self-forgetfulness which quite carried his listeners away. In thinking over the evening afterwards, Kathie was obliged to confess that, thanks to the young colonist, it had been by far the least dreary one they had spent since her return home, and she decided that if he could succeed in interesting her father in indifferent subjects and even in making him smile, as he had done more than once that evening, she could quite forgive him for coming to Beechwood.

"It is a beautiful place," he said one day, as he and Kathie were returning home from a walk, "I do not wonder you regret leaving it."

Kathie's eyes filled with tears, as, following the direction of his, they rested on the old house standing among the leafless trees, its oldest part veiled with ivy, its windows dazzling with the brilliance of the setting sun, and the blue, ethereal columns of smoke ascending from its chimneys.

"Yes, it is," she answered. "No place on earth can ever seem so beautiful to me. I love Beechwood dearly."

"I can quite believe it. I know how I should love such a home if it were mine; but I trust you will have a home at

the Cape as beautiful as this in a different way, and one which you will learn to love. You will not fail to like my country, Miss Milner; it is, I think, the fairest in the world."

"Thank you," she replied, smiling at his enthusiasm; "but no place out of England can ever be a home to me, and I have always thought it the fairest and most highly-favoured country of any on earth."

"So undoubtedly it is in many respects, but, happy and free as England is, it is not free enough for me. I delight in London, its stir, its life, and its culture, and I never enjoyed anything more in my life than a walking tour I took the summer before last through the country from Kent to Cumberland and down again; but I could not live permanently in this country, I should feel cramped and imprisoned; and then the climate, I should grow melancholy in a country that has so many grey days."

"Well, I admit that in the matter of climate there is room for improvement. I must confess to a predilection for sunshine—bright, hot sunshine."

"I can promise you plenty of sunshine, brilliant and unclouded, the finest of fruits, the fairest of flowers. Shall you want more than that to make you happy? I beg your pardon," he added quickly, as a heavy shadow crossed her face, I beg ten thousand pardons, I had forgotten for the moment what serious cause for unhappiness you have; permit me to say—I hope I am not too much of a stranger—that I sympathise most sincerely with you in your trouble, and I trust that your brother's innocence will be proved at no very distant day, and that you will be able, if you wish it, to return to England and to Beechwood."

"Thank you," she replied. "I hope so, but I fear that it is not at all likely. You know," she continued, "the hope my father entertains of finding Gerald in South Africa. He thinks, unknown as we are there, Gerald might come to us and remain with us without any one suspecting our relationship. Do you think he would be likely to stay in Cape Town if he landed there?"

He shook his head.

"I don't think it is at all probable," he replied. "There are so many arrivals from England, and he would be in greater danger of being recognised there than anywhere else."

"That is what I thought," said she. "Mr. Hildyard, you

know the country and the people, where do you think a stranger would be most likely to go, a stranger who wished to hide himself and be lost to all who had ever known him?"

"I can hardly say," he answered. "He may not have gone to Cape Town at all; he may have landed at Port Elizabeth, at East London, or even at Durban. South Africa is a very wide field, and it is easy enough for a man who wishes to lose himself there. Your father thinks he will join you in Cape Town; but I think it is very probable that he is even now beyond the reach of newspapers, and it may be long before he hears of your arrival in the country."

"Yes," said Kathie, sighing. "Papa and I both fear that, though we try to encourage each to hope that it is not so. Gerald may be there for years before he even learns that we have quitted England."

"It is possible, and perhaps it will be better so, Miss Milner. I mean that perhaps it will be better that he should not join you at once. In a year or two the affair will have had time to blow over and be forgotten, and there will be far less danger of his being recognised than at present."

It will be seen from the above conversation that Mr. Milner had trusted Ambrose Hildyard more completely than so short an acquaintance would seem to warrant; but there was something so confidence-winning, so reliable, and above all so sympathetic about the young colonist, that it was impossible not to trust him implicitly upon a very short acquaintance. Mr. Milner had not, to be sure, told him the confession which Gerald had made in his letter; but he had confided to him his belief that his son had gone to South Africa, and his hope of finding him there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST CHRISTMAS IN THE OLD HOME.

Ambrose Hildyard was engaged to spend his Christmas with some friends of his family in Wales, and though Kathie and her father sadly missed his bright face and pleasant voice when he was gone, they were glad when Christmas came that he was not with them, for it could not but be a day of gloom and sorrow to them, and one filled with haunting memories. Last Christmas had been such a happy one, and

Kathie's thoughts wandered persistently back to it—to the gay Christmas Eve party at Mrs. Osborne's, where she and Gerald had been favoured guests; to the bright morning which had followed it with its interchange of happy Christmas wishes; to the walk to church when the clear, frosty air was full of the music of the bells; then coming home to the gay luncheon at which Mr. and Mrs. Grey, Dr. and Mrs. Clitheroe, Sir John and Lady Vane, and the Osbornes had been present, with several other old and valued friends. How different, how very different everything was to-day. The Vanes and the Osbornes absent and estranged, the Clitheroes in Scotland, Mrs. Grey lying in the churchyard, Mr. Milner ill and heartbroken, and Gerald—where? The very skies were changed; they were not the cloudless, blue skies of last year, but low and stormy, covered with grey clouds, cold, dark and hopeless as her own heart. The wind wailed among the bare branches with a sobbing sound, which was inexpressibly mournful. Mr. Milner did not care to go to church, Clive had a severe cold and Sydney would not leave him, so Kathie and her little sister went alone. It was more because she knew that good Mr. Grey would be pained to see their pew empty than because she wished to go that Kathie went. The service had commenced when they reached the church, and Kathie's cheeks crimsoned with mingled shame and anger as she felt rather than saw the glances levelled at her, when, with Pearl's hand tightly clasped in hers, she passed up the aisle. They were not all cold and scornful though, far from it; many a kind and pitying glance rested on the two girls, and more than one rough hand was raised to wipe away a tear of true sympathy while not a few prayers were offered up on their behalf and for the erring one whose place was vacant and whose bright face had never before been absent from among them on that day. Kathie sank down in her place, thankful that the high, old-fashioned pew hid her from all eyes, whether kind or curious. She heard Mr. Grey's voice raised in prayer or exhortation, or telling in his gentle, earnest way, the story of Him who came a tiny infant into the lost world to save its people from their sins; but he might have been speaking in an unknown tongue for all she understood of what he was saying. A weight of grief, cold and heavy as lead, oppressed her heart, and with a clearness and distinctness that was agony last Christmas morning rose up before her.

"Oh, Gerald, Gerald! Where are you?" she moaned half aloud. "Oh, God! Why has such shame and sorrow come upon us all?" and bowing her head on the ledge before her, she gave way to a passion of bitter, hopeless tears, which she was utterly powerless to restrain. She kept her seat until every one had left the church, for she did not wish to speak to any one, she felt she could not trust her voice.

Luncheon passed in almost absolute silence. Mr. Milner sat with bent eyes fixed on vacancy, scarcely tasting a morsel; Kathie was afraid to try to speak, lest sobs should come instead of words; the children ate their meal with unimpaired appetite, but in wondering, uncomfortable silence. They could scarcely believe that this was Christmas, which had been always before such a bright, happy day. Old Roger, who waited at table, shook his head sadly, and every now and then took out his handkerchief and furtively wiped the tears out of his eyes. While Gerald's portrait smiled down on them all from its place on the wall, and the dark eyes seemed to look inquiringly at them as if asking the cause of all this strange gloom and sadness.

The dreary meal came to an end at last. Mr. Milner went to his room, the boys hurried to the nursery, where they indemnified themselves for their hour's silence by an unusually noisy, riotous game; Pearl took a story-book, and curling herself up in a huge velvet chair before the fire, was soon lost to everything outside its covers; while Kathie went to the piano, but she soon shut it again. Then she tried to read, but she could not become interested in the book; she wandered off to the nursery, but there the boys' wild merriment jarred upon her nerves, so she went downstairs again and walked restlessly up and down the drawing-room; but by-and-by, feeling as if the intense silence, broken only by the occasional tap of a bare twig against the window, would drive her mad, she put on her cloak and cap, and arming herself with an umbrella started for a walk. Outside all was cold, grey, and gloomy, the sky being covered with masses of cloud which hung low over the earth, and almost seemed to touch it. All round the horizon gave promise of a speedy further downfall of snow. The wind that had moaned and sobbed so pitifully all the morning was silent now. Nothing was stirring but the little birds who hopped up and down, leaving their tiny tracks in the snow. Kathie stood and watched them for a little while; she felt sadly

envious of the little brown, contented things, who knew nothing of sorrow or responsibility, who feared no to-morrow and remembered no yesterday.

It was not a very pleasant afternoon for a walk, the world lay dumb beneath its heavy pall of snow, the trees looked grim and unsympathetic, rearing their bare, leafless branches against the lowering sky, and the cold was intense; but anything was better than the oppressive, brooding silence and sadness of the house, and Kathie hurried on not caring in the least whither her steps led her. She had been walking a long time, when, reaching the crest of a hill covered with low, leafless trees, she came in sight of a little cottage standing in a garden, which in summer was green and well kept, but which now, like everything else, was covered with the snow's white carpet. It was a cottage which she had often visited with Gerald in her childish days and her school vacations, but which she had not seen since her last return home. Remembering what a warm welcome she had always received from John Rogers and the good Scotchwoman, his wife; how ready John had always been to mend Gerald's fishing lines and rods, and to manufacture for him just the right kind of flies; how Janet had always petted and made much of her, never permitting her to go without a fragrant bunch of lilac or lavender and roses to carry home, or a saucer of strawberries and cream, or one of the scones which she declared no one knew how to make right who was not a Scotchwoman born. She remembered how kindly the good woman had always kissed her at parting, and smoothed back tall Gerald's auburn curls, saying, "They're nought but puir, motherless bairns, John, for all they're rich and gentlefolks;" and a longing came over her to look into the kindly blue eyes and hear herself called "Miss Kathie, my bonnie bairn," again, so she opened the little gate and walked up the garden path. Mrs. Rogers saw her from the window, and the door was opened for her before she knocked.

"Ay, but my een didn't deceive me," she exclaimed. "It's Miss Kathie hersel' coom at last. Coom in, my bairn, you're as weelcome as flowers in May. John he thought ye'd forgot us, but I kenned ye better, I kenned ye wouldna go away frae England wi'out coomin' to say good-bye to us."

"No, indeed," Kathie replied earnestly, and feeling ashamed as she remembered that but for having accidentally,

as it were, stumbled upon the cottage, she might have done so.

Mrs. Rogers drew a great easy chair up to the fire, and placed Kathie in it, brought a footstool for her feet, and then with kindly, gentle hands removed her hat and boa. These loving little attentions, which might have been shown to a child, were inexpressibly grateful and soothing to her. She had been feeling so old and weary and responsible lately, and the tears which had been very near all day rushed to her eyes as Janet pushed back her hair and kissed her, saying:

"Ye're no looking weel, Miss Kathie, my bairn, no sae weel as when I saw ye last, but to my thinkin' ye're bonnier. An' so ye're goin' away frae us all."

"Very soon now, Janet; this is the last Christmas I shall spend in England for years, perhaps for ever."

"To think it, to think it!" repeated the good woman, shaking her head sadly. "And is it true what they tell me that ye're no goin' to ony Christian land, but to a country o' heathen savages? Ay, but I think lang about ye. The thought o' the terrible savages ye're goin' among has given me mony a bad dream."

"But you must not think we are going to live among savages, Janet; there are many good Christian people at the Cape of Good Hope."

"Ye dinna say sae. Well I'm rare an' glad to hear it; it maist broke my heart, and John's too, to think o't. And so ye'll see white faces now an' again, Miss Kathie."

"Why, yes, Janet," replied Kathie, smiling in spite of her sadness at Janet's lugubrious countenance, "I shall see as little of the wild savages of Africa where I am going as you will here in England."

Janet was interrupted in the expressions of astonishment she was about to utter by the entrance of her husband, a big, burly man with a face as kindly as his wife's, and making up in shrewdness what it lacked in gentleness. He shivered as he closed the door behind him, and, not seeing Kathie as she sat half buried in the depths of the great chair, hurried up to the fire.

"Well, Janet," he exclaimed, "'tis a dreary day and darksome, as if all the world was agrievin' because 'twas Christmas."

"Hush, John, dinna ye see we've got a visitor?"

"A visitor!" John turned round quickly. "Lor' sakes

if it ain't Miss Kathie!" he exclaimed. "I'm rale glad to see you, miss. We'll miss you when you're gone, and it'll be strange to see new people in the old place. But you'll be comin' back before long I expect, won't you, miss?"

"I don't know, John, but I think not; we are going with the intention of making our home in South Africa."

"And don't you think you'll be longing for old England before long?"

"I think it is very probable; England will always be home to me no matter where I go, but I dare say I shall learn to like the new country too."

"Yes," replied John, with a little approving nod, "we can mostly learn to like what we try to like, and they do tell me it's a beautiful country, with only three months of cold weather, and that not so over cold neither. That would suit you and me, wife, wouldn't it?"

"Ay, it might," returned Janet doubtfully, "but I've heard tell as they have midsummer at Christmas time, an' that doesna seem nateral. I'd never feel as if 'twas the blessed Christmas time if the sun was shinin' hot and the flowers bloomin'; it wouldna do for me, John."

"Well, maybe not; you and me's too old to change, but if we was twenty years younger, I'd be for goin' wi' the master, and askin' him to give us a start when we got there."

John Rogers had little idea, indeed, how far Mr. Milner was from being able to give "a start" or lend a hand to any one of those who in all the years they had known him had never asked for help in vain. But Kathie knew, and the recollection gave her a pang, half shamed, half sorrowful, and wholly bitter, and sent her off into a long reverie.

John and Janet glanced at her and then at each other, with a look which plainly expressed the pity and sympathy they dared not utter. Presently Kathie came out of her reverie, and talked cheerfully and easily of leaving the old home, as if the prospect were not giving her keen pain, and telling her kind old friends many things about the land to which she was going, which interested and astonished them not a little, and considerably modified their ideas on the subject. Janet had up to that time looked upon the land of the Cape of Good Hope as a country swarming with bloodthirsty savages, in a state of rampant ferocity and chronic warfare, while her husband had believed it to be one vast Golconda where diamonds were as plentiful and as easy to obtain as pebbles in

England. Janet therefore looked much relieved and John somewhat disappointed when Kathie had finished.

And so ye say, Miss Kathie, that ye don't stand a chance o' pickin' up a diamond whenever you take a walk. Why I thought that the children hunted for diamonds there just as they do for primroses here, only they could find 'em all the year round, and as for osteridge feathers, I thought they was as plentiful as grass. Will the squire keep a flock of osteridges, Miss Kathie, do you think?"

"No, I do not think so, indeed I am sure that he will not; he is not going to be a farmer, we are going to live in Cape Town, the capital of the Colony."

"And what's the squire going to be, Miss Kathie, if I may make so bold?"

"He has obtained an appointment under Government; I cannot tell you exactly what it is, for I do not know myself."

"I expect he'll come to be governor before long," said John confidently. "There ain't many men out there like the squire, I'll be bound."

Kathie laughed, and told him that she did not think it was at all probable, and soon after she rose, saying that she must go.

"Must ye go?" asked Janet regretfully. "But yes, I see ye must; it's growin' late an' cauld. Will ye be coomin' to see us again before ye gang awa'?"

"I am afraid I cannot; our time is very short now, and I have much to do and to think of."

"I ken weel ye have; ye're mither to the bairns, an' all the squire's got to comfort an' help him, I doubt not ye're hands are fu', my bairn, an' ye're heart too belike. Ye canna coom to me, an' my rheumates winna let me walk up to the Hall while this cold spell lasts; so we'll no' meet in this warld again, but we'll meet in the one where there's neither sorrow nor sighin' nor partin'——" Janet's voice broke, and John breathed a deep "Amen."

"Good-bye, Janet," said Kathie, taking the old woman's hand in both of hers. "I shall never forget all your kindness to me, nor all the pleasant times I have spent in this little room."

"Good-bye, my dear young leddy, old Janet will pray for ye night an' morn as long as the good Lord spares her; an' if prayers 'll keep ye safe there'll no harm overtake the ship that carries ye over the sea."

Kathie walked homeward much more quickly than she had come. Some of the gloom and hopelessness which had oppressed her when she set out were gone. A feeling of warmth and hope seemed to have crept about her heart, and in spite of the fact that she was walking for the last time in all probability over soil familiar to her from babyhood and dearly loved, and that she had just bidden an eternal farewell to two kind old friends who loved her, and whose homely but pleasant faces were inextricably intwined with her brightest recollections, she felt happier and less heavy-hearted than she had done for weeks. Such is the power of a warm hand-clasp and a few heartfelt words of genuine sympathy and affection. It was later, darker, and colder than when she had started from home, but somehow the melancholy, sombre look seemed to have gone from earth and sky, and she congratulated herself upon having, without volition of her own, found her way to Janet Rogers's cottage.

Christmas was over. Where would she be when Christmas came again? And where was Gerald now?

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAND OF EXILE.

A SWIFT, fair passage they had to the Cape of Good Hope. "A delightful voyage," the other passengers said; and doubtless Kathie would have found it delightful also under other circumstances, for the weather, as soon as they left cold northern latitudes behind, was lovely; the days were long and hot; the sky was cloudless; the sea a sheet of burnished gold by day and of molten silver by night; and the passengers were pleasant and friendly; but she could not forget the cause of the voyage nor the fact that they were every day farther from home, going into exile in a distant land.

One night, over a sea of rippling silver, under a jewelled sky, in the mellow light of the southern moon, they steamed into harbour, and the voyage was over. Beautiful, beyond the power of words to describe was the scene which lay spread out before the eyes of the few passengers who had remained on deck to see. Kathie Milner and Ambrose Hildyard were of the number; both looked on it with deep

admiration but with very different feelings; to the one it was home, to the other the land of exile. The sea glittered like polished steel in the light, and deepened to purple-black in the shadow; the fair city lay white and glistening in the bright moonbeams, and on the top of the strange, square mountain, the soft, pearly clouds rested like a crown. Kathie gazed on the fair, fair picture, till hot, blinding tears hid it from her sight.

"So we are here at last," she said. "This is the far-famed 'Cape of Storms.'"

"No," he replied significantly, bringing his smiling, happy eyes from the scene so familar to them and resting them earnestly on her face, "not the Cape of Storms, Miss Milner, the Cape of *Good Hope*."

The passengers were landed the next afternoon. Mr. Hildyard's carriage was waiting for the Milners, and into it they stepped immediately upon landing and were driven to his house.

Ingleside, as Mr. Hildyard's house was called, was a handsome villa, a short distance out of the town, standing in its own beautiful and well-kept gardens. It was a large house with substantial verandahs and graceful balconies, up and around and over which twined and twisted a wealth of creepers and trailing plants, the brilliant hues of whose blossoms were absolutely dazzling in the light of the setting sun. Mr. Hildyard stood at the gate to receive his guests. Kathie liked him at once, there was something so winning in the frank, blue eyes, and the hearty, kindly voice that bade them such a cordial welcome.

"Welcome to South Africa, Miss Milner, and to Ingleside. A thousand welcomes to you, my dear old friend!" and he grasped Mr. Milner's slender white hand in his large brown one, and held it as if he never meant to let it go again. "Ambie, my boy, thank God you are safe home again. Your aunt Hester has been in a state of fidget for the last three weeks, every time the wind has blown. And these are the children, are there only three? This is Pearl I know," giving that young lady a hearty kiss, "and these boys, what are their names? Sydney and Clive. Well, my boys, I hope you will like Cape Town and live here till you grow to be tall, strong, strapping colonists like Ambie there," and his proud, affectionate glance showed how dear to him was his stalwart son.

Ambie's aunt, Mrs. Wylde, was a widowed sister of Mr.

Hildyard. She had married, when very young, a wealthy farmer of the Eastern Province; five years later, being left a widow, she had come to reside at Ingleside, and was the only mother Ambie had ever known. She received them at the door, and her greeting, if somewhat more stately, was quite as cordial as her brother's.

After consigning the children to the care of a dusky, black-haired woman, she took Kathie to the room that had been prepared for her; and when the latter was left alone to change her travelling dress, she proceeded to examine with interest the pretty, dainty chamber and the beautiful view the windows commanded. She had never in her life before been out of England, never even crossed the channel to France or been to Scotland, and she could not but feel deeply interested in everything around her in this, another, hemisphere. Mr. Hildyard, unlike most wealthy colonists, who endeavour, in spite of the difference in country and climate, to copy in every detail of their domestic economy the manners, fashions, and customs of England, preferred to have everything about him as different as possible from that to which he had been accustomed in his native land. Kathie's room, therefore, was unlike any room she had ever occupied before; the walls, instead of being papered, were painted a pale green with a graceful border of vine leaves; the floor was covered with matting of native manufacture; the curtains of thin, white muslin were draped back from the wide open windows, through which were wafted the mingled and intoxicating odours of jessamine and roses. The fireplace was filled with most beautiful maidenhair fern and clusters of creamy lilies, which exhaled a delicious gardenia-like fragrance. On the lace-draped dressing-table were bouquets of roses and jessamine. Under one of the windows was a frail Madeira table, holding a large, curiously carved ivory flower-stand, which was filled with more of the pale, fragrant lilies and clusters of purple fuschias. Under the other window stood a low chintz-covered couch, over which was spread a leopard skin.

Kathie slowly took off her dress and put on another of white muslin, smiling to herself to think that only three weeks ago she was dressed in velvet and furs.

The dining-room was a long, low room, with a dark, polished floor and ceiling, from the latter of which hung several shaded lamps. Though large, the room contained nothing but the chairs and the table, the latter dazzling with

glass and fragrant with rare flowers. Three large glass doors, which led out on to a wide, stone-flagged verandah, stood open; and through them came the sound of the sea, the hum of the city, and the noise of innumerable insects. The young native girls, noiseless, deft, and picturesquely attired in short, full, white skirts, low shoes, and scarlet handkerchiefs folded turban-like around their heads waited at table. It was another fancy of Mr. Hildyard's to have none but native servants, the women dressed as we have described, the men in black with blue turbans.

In his own home the master of Ingleside never wore the stiff conventional evening dress, and as he took his seat at the table he apologised to Kathie for its absence. She wondered that he should consider any apology necessary, for what could be more suitable or more comfortable than the spotless white jacket, with the sprig of myrtle and forget-me-not in the button-hole, in which he sat down to dinner?

They were a very lively dinner party; Mr. Hildyard, his sister, and Ambie talked gaily, Kathie threw aside her sadness and joined in with animation, and even Mr. Milner, in the pleasure of again being in the company of his old friend, was more cheerful than he had been for a long time. After dinner, when Mrs. Wylde, Mr. Milner, and his father were talking over old times, Ambie took Kathie into the garden. She could not repress a slight cry of admiration as she stepped from the warm, brightly lighted drawing-room into the silvery moonlit beauty of the outer world.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed. "It is like fairyland!" And, indeed, it was no inapt comparison; the sea lay like an unruffled pool of silver, the purple sky was spangled with stars, white clouds hung over the mountain's square top, looking in the etherealising moonlight like a veil of silver gauze.

The grounds were planted with a variety of trees, native and foreign, English, American, and Australian. On one side was a clump of magnolias, whose broad, glossy leaves glittered like porcelain; on the other a row of beefwood trees, with their dark, sombre, leafless branches; on the lawn were tall cypresses, with convolvoli and white roses climbing up them. In the centre of the grounds was a beautiful artificial lake, around which grew a broad belt of calla lilies, and on an island in the middle was a small summer-house, covered on one side by a mass of starry jessamine,

and on the other with dark red passion flowers. Always keenly susceptible to the beautiful in nature, Kathie sank down on a rustic seat under a clump of acacias and drank in the lovely scene in silent, wrapt admiration, while Ambie stood by well pleased. Nothing delighted him more than genuine admiration and appreciation of his native land, for which he had a deep, almost enthusiastic, love.

"I am glad you like it," he said at length. "You could be contented and happy here, could you not? I mean, if we could find your brother."

"Yes, I think I could," she replied slowly. She felt, under the influence] of all this fairy-like beauty, that it would be easy to forget the past and be happy here; to forget the false friends who had forsaken her the moment that the withering breath of shame and sorrow had breathed upon her life; to forget even Graham Keith and his mean desertion of her. But somehow, with the remembrance of him whom she had not yet forgotten nor ceased to love, whatever she might do in the future, the fair scene seemed to lose its beauty and grow distasteful, and she rose hastily, saying they had better return to the drawing-room.

"Come and see my museum," said Mrs. Wylde to Kathie the next morning after breakfast, when Mr. Milner had driven away with his host to be introduced to the gentleman with whom he was to be associated in his office. "I would have proposed to drive you to Mosswood, I know you are anxious to see your new home, but the heat is so intolerable I think we shall find it pleasanter this afternoon. I hope the servants I have engaged will suit you."

"I am sure they will," replied Kathie, "but it will seem strange to have coloured servants."

"I dare say it will at first; I fancy, though, in time you will prefer them to English servants. I do not mean, of course, to those you had in England, but to any you could obtain here. You will like your new home, I think. Mosswood is a very pretty place, quite a little farm. You will be able to raise fruit and vegetables for the market," she added, laughing.

"I certainly shall then," replied Kathie, smiling too, but half serious. "I have a passion for gardening, and I want plenty to do."

Mrs. Wylde could not help noticing the sad tone in which the words were spoken, and the sudden cloud which chased the smile from Kathie's face.

"You will have plenty to do," she said, "if you superintend the servants and educate your sister and the little boys, as you tell me you intend doing."

"Yes, and that superintending," said Kathie, the smile coming again, "I fear. I shall get into difficulties very soon. I have many theories on the subject of domestic management, but practically I know nothing. I have spent my life at school and have had no chance of learning housekeeping.

"You must not expect to succeed all at once; but I do not doubt you will soon learn, and I shall always be happy to help you in any way I can."

Kathie thanked her warmly and they proceeded to the room that Mrs. Wylde called her museum. It was a long, narrow room opening by two glass doors on to a broad verandah. Above one of the doors was a pair of beautifully carved elephant's tusks, over the other an enormous pair of polished antlers. One side of the room, almost from the floor to the ceiling, was covered with stuffed birds. Every variety of South African bird was represented there, from the ugly, ragged aásvogel to the tiny "sugar-beak," whose brilliant plumage rivals that of the humming-bird. The floor, of black, polished wood, was carpetless, being covered instead with the skins of animals. Mrs. Wylde pointed to one, a great tawny skin spread out in front of a massive cabinet.

"That," said she, "is the skin of a lion which Ambie shot a year ago up in the Transvaal; and this leopard skin is also that of an animal which he killed. It has a history; I must tell it to you some day. Those spread before the door are wild cat skins sent to me by a friend in the Eastern Province."

In the middle of the room was a plain, unpolished table of native wood covered with baskets of shells, which had been gathered from every sea-beach in South Africa, from Cape Town to Mozambique. Kathie lingered long, admiring and examining these frail "treasures of ocean." On another table were little baskets and bowls made of ostrich egg-shells, on which were painted the portraits of noted Kafir and Zulu chiefs—Hintza, Kreli, Chaka, Cetewayo, &c.—and inside were fragile bunches of flowers made entirely of tiny, snow-white fish scales.

"And this is where I keep my minerals," said Mrs. Wylde, opening the drawers of the large cabinet. "It would be better filled if I would consent to receive the minerals

of other countries, but I wish my museum to contain South African curiosities only. I have here copper ore from Namaqualand, iron ore, sulphur, galena, coal from the Stormbergs, Natal, and the Transvaal, gold quartz from the Transvaal, diamonds and blue ground from Kimberley, agates, crystals, and all kinds of curious stones from the Vaal River diamond diggings."

Another cabinet contained cases of insects of all kinds—hideous spiders; beetles, crimson, purple, bronze, and silver; moths and butterflies of all sizes and every shade of colour, many of them of exquisite beauty. There was also a bewildering variety of carved pipes, walking-sticks, necklaces of carved beads and seeds, bracelets, anklets of brass, copper, and ivory, which would have delighted the heart of a Kafir chief. There was a box of fans and screens made of ostrich feathers, the beautiful leaves of the silver tree, of ivory and horn. A rare collection of sea-weeds, ferns, mosses, dried flowers, and plants, and—what Kathie enjoyed almost most of all—a number of water-colour sketches of South African scenery. The Zambesi Falls, St. Lucia Bay, the Buffalo River at East London, bits of river and forest in Pondoland, parts of the Vaal River with great wild willows drooping their branches into its yellow waters; sketches of Free State flats, with herds of half wild horses and cattle feeding over them; wild, beautiful sea pictures; sketches of strange animals, trees, birds, and flowers.

"They are all sketches made by friends of mine," said Mrs. Wylde, "for though I seldom leave Cape Town myself, I number a good many travellers among my friends, and from every one who can sketch I insist upon a picture of every place and thing which has any pretensions to beauty, strangeness, or even uncommon ugliness; and those who cannot sketch must send me something else, nothing comes much amiss—skins, horns, gold dust, stones, shells, plants, seeds—and the smallest contributions are thankfully received; and so I have contrived to fill my museum. Ambie has been my chief contributor, and we have spent many a delightful hour arranging and classifying our treasures."

Kathie spent a pleasant morning, examining and admiring, asking questions, and listening to curious little tales and anecdotes which Mrs. Wylde had to tell about one and another of her treasures, and she was quite surprised when she heard the carriage in which her father and Mr. Hildyard

had driven away returning, and knew that it must be two o'clock.

After lunch the whole party drove over to Mosswood, the small estate which, on Ambie's recommendation, Mr. Milner had commissioned Mr. Hildyard to purchase for him. The furniture had arrived before them and had been placed in the house.

Mosswood was about a mile and a half from Ingleside, and the house, though by no means so large as Mr. Hildyard's, was, to Kathie's mind, far more picturesque. It was a long, low, stone house, with a high gabled roof, and a broad verandah running all around. A wooded hill rose abruptly at the back, giving promise of delightful rambles in the dewy morning and cool evening hours. On one side of the house was a small vineyard, on the other an orchard, in front was a large flower garden. It was not filled with rare flowers like the gardens at Ingleside. There was no wealth of gardenias, jessamine, stephanolis, &c. On the contrary, the former owner seemed to have delighted in old-fashioned English flowers, and Kathie caught a glimpse of mignonette, roses, carnations, heliotrope, and a gorgeous mass of verbenas growing together in half wild confusion, and she resolved as soon as possible to undertake the pleasant task of reducing the garden to order.

Mr. Hildyard produced the key, opened the house door, and the whole party filed in. Kathie had expected a dusty house, full of packing cases and the mouldy, damp smell of long disuse, but what was her surprise upon entering the drawing-room to find it charmingly arranged; the old familiar carpet on the floor, the well-known furniture in its place, her piano and music stand, and on the tables fresh bouquets of flowers. Her face flushed with pleasure and gratitude for the thoughtful kindness which had prepared this surprise for them.

"How nice!" she exclaimed, turning to Mrs. Wylde. "I know whom we have to thank for this; it was very kind of you."

"Not at all," she answered cordially. "I am glad you like it; I was half afraid you would consider that I had taken a liberty."

"We could not possibly think that," said Mr. Milner. "We are extremely grateful to you, Mrs. Wylde. It must have given you a great deal of trouble."

"Not the slightest, I assure you. On the contrary, it gave me a great deal of pleasure, and kept me out of mischief for three whole days. I wished you to avoid that unpleasant impression which an empty, dusty house always produces."

"It was very good of you," said Kathie gratefully, "and a great deal of trouble to take for strangers."

"I never for a moment regarded you as strangers," Mrs. Wylde answered. "My brother's old friend and mine and his children could scarcely seem like strangers to me."

Kathie pressed her hand gratefully, and they proceeded to an examination of the rest of the house, while Mr. Milner, Mr. Hildyard, Ambie, and the children went to make acquaintance with the orchard. The house was not very large; it contained besides the drawing-room a large dining-room, half a dozen bedrooms, a long, low room, into which Mrs. Wylde had put as much as it would hold of the Beechwood library furniture, a large kitchen, a wide stone-flagged pantry, and opening on to the great verandah a small empty room.

"This room," said Mrs. Wylde, "was used by the former owner as a storeroom for dried fruits and seeds."

"I shall put it to a better use," said Kathie. "I think it will make an excellent schoolroom and study, do not you?"

"Yes, indeed; and the view from the window is so lovely. The children will study all the better for that; at least, I fancy children study better when they are enjoying the birds' songs and the flowers at the same time. I always did, I know."

Mrs. Wylde had caused to be placed in the carriage a basket containing fruit, cake, wine, and sherbet; and while she and Kathie had been going over the house Ambie and the boys—the former a boy himself for the time—had carried a small table out into the garden, and when they returned were arranging the repast upon it with much fun and merriment, while Pearl was busy making up bouquets to lay beside the plates.

"Isn't it a pretty place, Kathie?" cried Sydney, running up to her. "I am so glad we are going to live here. I think the Cape Colony is the nicest place in the world. I only wish Gerald was here."

The shadow of sadness fell like a veil over Kathie's face at the little boy's words; but Ambie did not intend that sad

thoughts should have any place in the afternoon's entertainment, and he did his best to chase them away. He talked, laughed, told comical stories and amusing anecdotes, and was the life of the party, and before it was time to start again for Ingleside he had the satisfaction of hearing her laugh.

CHAPTER X.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

After a fortnight spent at Ingleside the Milners moved to their own home, and by degrees settled down to the new life in the new land, and a very different life it was to them all from that which they had led before. Very different to Mr. Milner from his studious life at Beechwood, different to Kathie from her smooth, untroubled school life, perhaps not so very different to the children, who had spent most of their time running wild over the grounds and gardens of Beechwood in much the same manner as now they ran wild over the great orchard at Mosswood.

As soon as they were fairly settled Kathie took the wild garden in hand, and out of the beautiful confusion created a still more beautiful order. She trained the wild straggling roses around the windows, cleared the paths of the mignonette and verbenas which ran riot over them, pruned and tended the fragrant standard roses that bloomed with a freer and more lavish generosity than in the old garden at home, and planted in the shady bed under her window the pale gold, mauve, and creamy pink lilies which Ambie brought her from Ingleside, and she was delighted with the result of her labours. But Kathie wanted some amusement besides gardening, something which would occupy mind as well as hands, and this she found in the books which she had arranged in the little room which had been fitted up for a schoolroom. Independently of a natural tendency which would have led her under any circumstances to take pleasure in intellectual pursuits, she felt the necessity of creating for herself an interest and a duty which should be strong enough to prevent her mind from wandering for ever drearily among the ruins of the past, It was part of the business of her life to forget that past. with its joys, bright hopes, and cruel humiliations and dis-

appointments, and she despised herself because the forgetfulness was so long in coming. She need not have done so, however, for it is the best, strongest, and noblest natures that find it the hardest to forget and regard with indifference what they have once loved. But with this end in view, and partly because she could not help it, Kathie toiled on diligently, as if she had been preparing for an Oxford examination. History, mathematics, music, German, and botany were the subjects, and she studied with the regularity of clockwork. The rest of the time she superintended the servants and taught the children. Mr. Milner would have sent them to school or engaged a governess for them, but Kathie begged to be allowed to educate them herself, and he, as usual, yielded to her strong wish, and a more earnest, patient, loving teacher they could not have had, while more diligent, obedient pupils it would have been hard to find. Mrs. Wylde wished to take Kathie to balls and parties; she would have presented her at Government House and introduced her to the best society of the colonial capital, but Kathie declined. Such gaieties as her friend tried to induce her to participate in she had no taste for, and even if she had expected to find pleasure in them she would not have felt justified in leading a gay life while such dark uncertainty hung over her brother's fate. Nothing had as yet been heard of Gerald Milner. There had been no answer to the advertisements which Mr. Milner had from time to time inserted in every newspaper in the Colony and Natal, imploring him to come or to write. If Gerald saw them and was aware of his father's arrival in Cape Town he made no sign, and as the months went on the hope which had brought Mr. Milner out to the Cape began to fade away, leaving in its place an ever-deepening depression and disappointment, all the more intense and bitter because he never spoke of the latter. His son's name seldom crossed his lips, even when alone with Kathie, though it was never absent from his mind, and she knew that he often spent hours gazing at Gerald's portrait, which he kept locked away in his own room. That the solitary hours thus spent were bad for her father, Kathie knew, and she tried by every means in her power to induce him to give them up. The appointment which Mr. Hildyard had procured for him being little else than a pleasant sinecure, left him many hours of leisure, more wearisome than the hardest toil. Often and often would Kathie leave her book, her teaching, or her gardening, and going out to

where her father was seated, with his head on his hands and that far-away look in his eyes that made her heart ache, would persuade him to join her in a walk, a ride, or drive to Ingleside, but it was very seldom that he yielded to her persuasions. He preferred the company of his own sad thoughts to any other; even his old friend's society had ceased to have any charm for him, and he rarely went to Ingleside, for the sight of the father and son so happy together in their mutual love and confidence seemed to make his own bereavement the more hard to bear. But Ambie was always sure of a welcome at Mosswood; he was the only one who ever succeeded in chasing the cloud from his brow. Indeed shadows, clouds, and hopelessness could hardly live in his presence, so bright and sanguine was his disposition, so sunny his smile, the very sound of his voice seemed to impart hope, the pressure of his hand to give confidence.

"Kathie, how should you like to leave Cape Town?"

"Leave Cape Town, papa! To go where?"

"To go and live a gipsy life at the Vaal River diamond diggings."

"At the diamond diggings," repeated Kathie wonderingly once more.

"Yes, the diamond diggings, Kathie. I wish you would remember that it is very tiresome to have one's words repeated in that fashion."

"I beg your pardon, papa; but what has made you think of going to the diamond diggings? What should we do there?"

"What other people do, of course—look for diamonds. Durwood has just come down from Kimberley, and he has been talking to me about the river diggings. You remember Durwood, he dined here once some time ago."

"Yes, I remember him," replied Kathie, liking the idea of going to the diamond diggings none the more because it had emanated from Mr. Durwood, the keen-eyed, hook-nosed lawyer, whose insinuating voice, silky manner, together with his reputation for excessive shrewdness in business, had not recommended him to her admiration.

"Well, he tells me that the people lead a pleasant, healthy life at the diggings in tents and reed houses amidst beautiful scenery in a delightful climate, and I have been thinking that we might do worse than go there if it is as he says."

"But, papa, I thought that the river diggings were almost deserted now except by a small number of people who scarcely contrive to make a living by the sale of the few diamonds they find. I am sure I have heard Mr. Hildyard say so."

"Yes, I have heard so, too; but Durwood assures me it is not the case; he says that although the large and rapid fortunes which used to be made there in the early days are not made now, the diamonds are still plentiful and comparatively easy to find. I am inclined to give it a trial. I am unspeakably weary of this life, and a change will not hurt any of us, I fancy, and we can come back if we don't like it."

Kathie thought this might not prove so easy, but she did not say so. She had known for some time that her father was weary of Cape Town, and that his employment, light and pleasant as it was, had grown distasteful to him; and she had guessed that the time was not far off when he would decide to leave Cape Town. Two years had passed since the Milners had said good-bye to Beechwood, two quiet, uneventful years, during which Sydney and Clive had grown strong and healthy, and Beechwood and England had almost faded from their recollection; Pearl had grown into a graceful exceedingly pretty but rather delicate girl of fifteen, warm-hearted and impulsive, and repaying all Kathie's tender care by a love and devotion very precious to the latter; and Kathie had learned during those two years to like Mosswood and the duties and interests which had grown to be hers, and the past, though it would not sink into oblivion as she wished, had ceased to be the cruel, stinging memory it once was. But as Kathie grew more contented and the children perfectly happy in the new home, the shadow grew deeper and deeper on their father's face, making him look far older and more worn than, considering his years, he had any right to look.

Ambie Hildyard was no longer in Cape Town. Three months ago he had left Ingleside to assist his brother-in-law in the management of a large business in Kimberley. Before he went he laid his brave, true heart at Kathie's feet, and the gift had been declined. Very gently, very sorrowfully, but very firmly she had told him that what he wished could never be, and he had gone away with a heavier heart than he had ever known in his life before. His bright, gay presence was missed almost more at Mosswood than at Ingleside.

In the evening Mr. Durwood came to dinner and produced afresh the unpleasant impression which he had made upon Kathie before. He was very lively, very talkative, and had much to say about the trip he had recently taken through Griqualand West, and especially about the time he had spent at the Vaal River diggings.

"I quite fell in love with Hebron," he said, "such a pleasant, free, gipsy life the diggers lead, always in the open air! Just the thing for these two growing boys, Miss Milner," he added, turning to Kathie.

"They could hardly spend more time in the open air than they do at present," she answered coldly, for she saw that her father was being carried away by the lawyer's eager talk.

"But look at the difference in the climate," he went on, replying to her remark. "Why up there they never have the fogs and damps which we suffer from here occasionally; it is as dry and clear as possible, just like champagne. One can sleep outside all the year round without feeling any ill-effects. It's a glorious climate, Mr. Milner."

"How about the rainy season? I should say that life in tents would not be very pleasant while that lasts," said Kathie.

"Well," admitted Mr. Durwood suavely, "it is doubtless not so pleasant at that time as one could wish, but it does not last long, and the storms are by no means so terrible as probably you have heard them described, and if one has a good tent strongly put up the storms that clear the air two or three times a week are rather pleasant than otherwise. Oh, I like the place immensely! I'd sooner be there than in Cape Town any day."

Kathie devoutly wished that as he was so enamoured of the diamond diggings he would go there and leave them in peace in Cape Town.

"The place has so many advantages," he continued presently, turning to Milner. "There is the river with good fishing and rowing, not to speak of pretty walks on its banks. Then it is only thirty miles from Kimberley, three hours' ride and you are in the midst of the bustle and activity of the busiest, gayest town in the country, which is of course a pleasant change sometimes from the half-wild, Bohemian life of the diggers."

"I have been told that the diamonds are very scarce and very hard to find, and that the river diggings only pay when worked by companies."

"Oh, no; that's quite a mistake, I assure you, Miss Milner, and though one cannot now go there with nothing one week and leave the next with a fortune, as often enough happened in the early days, still the diggers do remarkably well. They don't all get rich, though I am bound to say some of them do that too; but they all make a living, and a very comfortable one too, for their expenses are trifling, living is very cheap, and the diamonds always fetch a good price, even the small ones, for they are far superior to those obtained in the Kimberley mines."

"And the work?" put in Mr. Milner, with increasing interest. "That is, I presume, very laborious."

"Not at all," replied the lawyer eagerly. "I think diamond digging is the most fascinating pursuit in the world; when I was in Hebron I spent most of my time hanging over the diggers' sorting tubs. Of course," he added hastily, catching a glance from Kathie's eyes which he thought expressed some incredulity, "of course the digging, washing, and gravitating are hard enough, but all that is invariably done by the natives; the Europeans do only the sorting, and nothing could be easier than that."

"No, I should say not," said Mr. Milner. "I am inclined to think I should enjoy looking for diamonds, for a time, at least."

"I am sure you would," the lawyer answered eagerly, "and it's easy enough to leave the place when one grows tired of it. One has no house to sell or let, for every one who goes there merely pitches his tent wherever he pleases, and when he is ready to leave he has nothing to do but pull up his pegs, and there are no rents and no taxes."

"And what sort of neighbours would one be likely to have?"

"That would depend on one's self. One might camp beside some rough farmer from the Free State, who has given up farming in favour of the more pleasant and profitable pursuit of diamond seeking; or one might pitch one's tent beside that of some broken-down swell from the old country, who has run through one fortune and is anxious to make another as soon as possible; or you may have for your neighbour some one who prefers a tent at the diggings to a lodging in the jail. There are all sorts of people in Hebron. If I were hiding from the law I should be inclined to go there, for a man might live there for a year without any one so much as finding out his name if he did not wish it known."

Kathie glanced at her father and guessed by the sudden lighting up of his face the thought that had flashed into his mind, and she knew that it needed nothing more than the suggestion of a possibility of Gerald's being there to make him decide to go to the diggings forthwith.

Mr. Durwood called often at Mosswood during the next week or two, and never without bringing the conversation round to the river diggings. He talked of the climate, the delightful gipsy life the diggers led, of the "grand old river," as he called the yellow, treacherous Vaal, and never wearied of sounding their praises, until Kathie grew tired of the name of Hebron and dreaded the sight of the hawk-eyed lawyer.

The matter ended, as Kathie from the first had feared that it would, in Mr. Milner's deciding to throw up his lucrative appointment, to let Mosswood, and go to the diamond diggings. Every one was astonished when his determination became known, and friends and acquaintances tried to induce him to change his mind; but in vain, his decision once made Mr. Milner was not to be moved from it. Kathie deeply regretted that the only persons whose advice and opinion would have any weight with him were not there to give it, for Mr. Hildyard and Mrs. Wylde were absent on a visit to England, and would not be back for months. It was with many forebodings that Kathie began the preparations for leaving Mosswood, and the knowledge that Mr. Durwood was to have sole management of her father's affairs during his absence did not tend to make her more confident of the wisdom of the step they were taking.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VAAL RIVER DIGGINGS.

THE hot, red sun of an August afternoon was shining down upon the Vaal River, and bathing all the rough, rocky hills of Hebron in a copper-coloured glow, when a wagon, drawn by a lumbering span of eighteen thin, long-horned oxen, crawled slowly up the dusty road leading from the pont, and stopped at the bottom of one of the long, stony hills or "kopjes."

"Will this do?" asked the driver, throwing down his long whip and turning to Mr. Milner, who had come down

from his seat at the back of the wagon to inquire the reason of the halt.

"Do. What for?" asked he.

"I say, will it do for a camping place? This'll be as good a place to pitch your tents on as any other, I think."

"Pitch my tents here!" exclaimed Mr. Milner. "Between these great holes and heaps. What are you thinking of?"

"I'm thinking you won't find a better place very easy. This kopje'll keep a good deal of wind off you."

"Wind," interrupted Mr. Milner impatiently. "And what will keep the water off us when it rains? It must rush down this hill, or 'kopje,' as you call it in, torrents."

The man glanced indifferently up the hill. "Humph! it wouldn't take long to dig a trench around your tents, and turn the water off into one of those holes. You have more reason to be afraid of wind here than water, if I know anything about it; and I ought to, for I've lived on the river ever since I was the size of that youngster there," he said, pointing with his sjambok to Clive, who, with Kathie, Pearl, and Sydney, had alighted and was listening to the discussion.

"It may be as you say," answered Mr. Milner, "but I have other reasons besides the one I mentioned for not wishing to pitch my tents here; I am sure there must be a better place farther on."

"You'd better tell me where it is then," returned the driver insolently, "for I don't know of it. There's not a better place to outspan than the bottom of Natal Kopje, I know very well, and if there is I'm not going to it; my bullocks are just done up, they're not fit to go another yard, and it won't pay me to kill them yet awhile."

"It would pay you to be a trifle more civil and obliging," said Mr. Milner, longing to lay the sjambok about the fellow's shoulders, but restraining his anger. "You undertook to bring me to Hebron, and I undertook to pay you for your trouble, and I shall not allow you to unyoke your oxen until you have taken me as far as I wish to go; and I warn you if you persist in stopping here against my wish I shall decidedly refuse to pay you." These words, very coldly and firmly spoken, had some weight with the man, but he only answered gruffly

"You'd better make up your mind where you want to go then, for I mean to get my bullocks outspanned before it's too dark for them to see to feed, they haven't had a blade of

decent grass for the last two days," and he sauntered off to the top of the hill, and, taking out his pipe, began to smoke.

"I had better go and make inquiries," said Mr. Milner. "Some of the people here will be able to tell us where to go. It is impossible to stop in this place."

"Here comes some one who will, perhaps, give us some information," said Kathie, glancing down the road at a man who was coming towards them, and with difficulty repressing a smile, so exceedingly comical was his appearance. He was very tall and thin, and walked with a curious swinging step, which somehow gave one the idea that his limbs had no sort of connection with each other, and were attached to his body by means of wires. He was dressed in white trousers, a yellow and blue striped "jersey," and a broad straw hat, about the size of an ordinary umbrella. Over his shoulder he carried a huge fork and a string from which hung several large fish. His hair was black, and hung in a curly mass on to his shoulders. It was impossible by merely looking at him to tell to what nationality he belonged, whether English, Dutch, or German, but the instant he opened his mouth to speak it was impossible to remain in doubt; the quick decided voice and nasal accent proclaimed unmistakably that he hailed from the land of the stripes and stars.

"Well, sir," he began, with difficulty raising the umbrella-hat in acknowledgment of Mr. Milner's polite greeting, "you seem to be in a fix. Can I help you?"

"I believe you can, if you will be so good," answered Mr. Milner courteously. "I shall be very much obliged to you if you will tell me of a good place to pitch my tents. My driver says that I am not likely to find a better place than this."

"Is that your driver settin' up there?" asked the singular-looking individual, pointing with his fork to the sullen, smoking Jehu.

"That is he. He says he knows of no better place to camp than this."

"Humph! 'taint much he does know about 'sides hammerin' his bullocks and givin' folks impidence. I guess I know a better place than this; it's on the top of the kopje, at the back. It's a sight better. Why, you'd be smothered with dust here every time the wind blew, and swamped whenever it rained."

"That is what I thought. Is the place you mentioned very far off?"

"Oh, no; it's just down the road here, and up the kopje on the other side; 'taint far, you'd have time to put up your tents before dark. I won't say it's a pretty place, but there is a blade or two o' grass there and some bushes."

"I wonder if Smith knows the way," said Mr. Milner, beckoning to the driver, who, however, took no notice, but puffed away at his pipe and kept his seat.

"He knows it right enough," replied their new friend; "but he don't look as if he means to move this month. I'll drive you there if you like."

"Are there many people camped there?" asked Kathie.

"Ain't another tent 'sides mine. It's a nice, quiet place; the worst of it is it's a long way from the water," and throwing his fork and fish into the wagon, he took the long whip and in a stentorian voice ordered the tired, patient span to "trek." In about fifteen minutes they had climbed up the steep, white road which led up the other side of the kopje. If Kathie had not seen the bottom of Natal Kopje she would have thought the top very dreary indeed. But, as it was, the sight of the short, burnt grass, and the stunted, sage-like shrubs, which their new friend called vaal-bushes, was quite refreshing after the glaring heaps of red sand and gravel which covered the other side of the hill.

"How'll this suit you?" asked the American.

"It is infinitely better than the other place," Mr. Milner answered. "But would it not be still better higher up?"

"I don't think so; you see the wind's uncommon strong up there. I tell you, it knows how to blow in this place. Last week it blew great guns, and there wasn't a tent left standin' on this side the river, not one but mine."

"And how did yours escape? It stands on a considerable elevation, I see."

"That it does; I admire to be high up in the world. How did it escape? Well, me and four Kaffirs was inside holdin' on to the poles all the time, or it would have gone down the hill like a feather."

"I hope such gales are not frequent," said Kathie, beginning to feel slightly alarmed.

"Well, I wish I could say they wasn't," replied the stranger, looking with a very benign expression upon the young lady. "But to tell the truth they are. It blows pretty well all the year round, but it's worst in July and August, I guess.

Where'll you have your tents pitched?" he added, turning to Mr. Milner.

"Here, I think," he answered, pointing to a spot a few yards off, which appeared less rocky than the ground about it. I am much obliged to you for bringing us to this place. Whom have I to thank for so much kindness."

"Who? Oh, my name's Chips-Jethro, Towser Chips, at your service; but you ain't got ter thank me, I ain't done nothin' worth bein' thanked for. Lor! I'd ha' done as much for any one."

"That is no reason why I should not be grateful to you for having done it for me, is it?" asked Mr. Milner, smiling.

"Have you any one to help you fix up?"

"Only the leader and two natives I hired in Kimberley; they stopped behind at the river, I think. I fear Smith will not give me much assistance."

"No, I guess he won't; but I can help you. If you like I'll jest go and fetch a couple o' my boys, and we'll fix you up in no time." And without waiting for Mr. Milner's thanks he hastened away.

"That's a good fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Milner, looking after him.

"He is extremely good-natured," said Kathie. "I wonder if he is a digger."

"I fancy so. When he returns I shall try and get some information from him. This place does not seem to me to be exactly what Durwood described it."

"Indeed, it does not. He said it was a very pretty place, and the people all prosperous and doing well; but I do not believe they are, for as we came up from the pont I noticed numbers of the most wretched looking places made of canvas, reed, or iron, and some of them of all three materials combined, which I suppose were the diggers' dwellings, and I must say that they suggested anything but prosperity."

"I noticed them, also; but I fancy they are the dwellings of the native diggers."

"I think not, for I saw white children playing around some of the worst looking. I hope Mr. Durwood has not deceived us."

"I hope not—I think not; but, Kathie, if we find the place to be different from what we expect, we can leave it; we need not stay here a day longer than we choose."

Kathie did not feel so sure of that; she foresaw that it

might be easier to pitch their tents and settle down on the diamond diggings than to uproot themselves again from its rocky soil and to return whence they came. Presently she wandered to the top of the hill which commanded a view of the diggings, and looked down on the strange, not altogether unpicturesque scene below. Opposite her was a long steep hill or "kopje," covered with huge heaps of stones and gravel, all of the same unpleasant, bright, red colour. At the upper end were huge rocks, and stunted thorny shrubs, with a flock of long-haired goats and a few donkeys feeding amongst them. Several white men and a number of natives were working in the square shallow claims between the heaps, and, dotted all over the kopje, amongst the shrubs, rocks, and heaps of fine, red sand, were tents and reed shanties in every stage of dilapidation—doubtless the homes of the diggers. Such homes! The longer Kathie gazed at them the more convinced she became that this was not the prosperous, pleasant place that Durwood had pictured. Whether intentionally or not, he had deceived them. She turned her eyes to the river, seeking some relief from the intolerable glare. The hills, the roads, the tents, and even the flock of goats seemed to partake of the prevailing colour. The river looked cool and sparkling; but where, she asked herself, were the beautiful wild willows which had formed such a feature in the landscape which the lawyer had sketched with so glib a tongue?

"I wonder," thought she, looking from one to another of the flapping tents, "if it is possible that Gerald is here, and, if so, whereabout in this strange, rocky, dusty place. Poor, poor Gerald! if he has been living here for two years!"

Just then a figure emerged from one of the tents opposite and crossed the road. Kathie smiled involuntarily as she recognised the unmistakable figure and costume of Mr. Chips.

"Our first friend in Hebron," she said to herself. "If all the other diggers are original and eccentric in manners and appearance, they will be an interesting study, and if they are all as good-natured we shall have nothing to complain of."

Good-natured Mr. Chips undoubtedly was. When Kathie returned to the wagons he had just appeared on the scene followed by three burly natives.

"Now, sir," he began, "we're ready; just tell us where to begin and we'll fix you up."

"But, really," said Mr. Milner expostulatingly, "I am very unwilling to trespass upon your time and kindness in this manner."

"You needn't have no scruples, sir," replied Chips earnestly, "I take a holiday once a week. Most o' the diggers takes theirs of Saturday, but I take mine whenever I fancy it most, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or any other day, and I never like to spend it doin' nothin'. This afternoon's my holiday, and I'd rather spend it helpin' you than doin' any other thing; so if you haven't got no other objection to acceptin' my help than that you don't like to take my time we'll say no more about it, but jest pitch in."

"I could not possibly have any other objection. You are very kind."

"No, I ain't kind," returned the other, who seemed to be very impatient of thanks, taking an axe from one of the natives and beginning energetically to chop away the vaal-bush stumps and thorny shrubs with which the ground was covered. "It's one digger's duty to help another. You're agoin' to dig I s'pose."

"I came here for that purpose," Mr. Milner answered. "The diamonds are plentiful, are they not?"

"I wish I could say they was," he replied, with a short laugh. "They're like angels' visits—few and far between."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Milner, unpleasantly surprised at the answer. "I heard very differently. I was told that the diamonds, although not so abundant as in former years were still plentiful."

"The fellow who told you that told a yarn," said Chips coolly. "The diamonds ain't plentiful; I wish they was, I'd be a sight better off I know."

"I beg your pardon, but perhaps we do not mean quite the same thing by 'plentiful.' My friend told me that fortunes were not made now as in the early days. 'The large and valuable stones were scarce,' he said, 'but the smaller ones were to be found in sufficient numbers to render diamond digging a very profitable employment.'"

"Well," said Chips, pausing and leaning on the rake with which he had begun to rake the stones together, "me and him mayn't mean the same thing by 'profitable' neither, but I should say it wasn't profitable decidedly. I s'pose the diggers make a livin', most of 'em, but I tell you it's a mighty hard livin'. I believe in speakin' plain," he added half apologetically, observing the expression of disappoint-

ment and surprise on Mr. Milner's face. "I see no good in deceivin' people and tellin' 'em what ain't true. If people manage to pay their expenses and keep out o' debt it's as much as they can manage, and there's some, I'm sorry to say, that can't do that much. Supposin' now that the diamond buyer comes here twice a week and gits a parcel of fifty diamonds each time, that makes a hundred a week. Now if there's six hundred diggers on the fields—there may be more or less, I don't know—but if there's six hundred that makes on a average a diamond every six weeks to each one, and supposin' they're worth on a average twenty pounds, that'll show you that there ain't much hangin' to it; for, of course, whether you find or not the expenses go on; you must pay your boys and give 'em their food all the time, and you must buy water for washin', and that 'mounts up in a month to somethin' considerable."

"What you say surprises me very much," said Mr. Milner. "My friend gave me very different accounts."

"Your friend couldn't ha' knowed what he was talkin' about," replied the Yankee bluntly. "In the early days they did make fortunes, and fine ones too, but that was long ago, before the place was so thoroughly worked out as it is now. This kopje in front o' us—Natal Kopje it's called—was chock full o' diamonds at one time, and a company from Natal came here and made a fortune in less time than it takes to talk about it. The kopje got its name from that company. Lots o' other folks made fortunes, too, out o' the kopjes about here. But you see they got the diamonds out, and they've been gittin' 'em out ever since, and once they're out they're out; they ain't like potatoes—a fresh crop comin' on every season—though to hear folks talk you'd think they was. They can't last for ever."

"No, to be sure; the supply is bound to become exhausted in time. But are there not places not yet discovered as good or perhaps better than those you have mentioned?"

"Well, sir, there may be, but for my part I doubt it. You see the country round about has been scraped over and pretty thoroughly prospected, especially of late, and there ain't much been found worth lookin' for."

Mr. Milner was silent, and Chips said presently, "You'll think me a regular croaker, but, as I said a while ago, I don't see no use in tellin' nothin' but the plain truth, and that's the truth as far as I know it."

"Thank you; there is nothing I like so much to hear as

the truth, though I must confess that in the present instance it is somewhat disappointing. But I was wondering why, if you have so poor an opinion of the place, you are staying here yourself. You are a digger, I presume."

"Oh, yes, when I'm in Hebron I'm a digger, at other times I'm a transport-rider, and then I go on a trip to the interior, and then I'm a hunter. I'm a regular Jack-o'-all-trades. You see, diamond diggin' ain't such bad work for me. I'm used to roughin' it. I've got no one to trouble about but myself, and my expenses ain't considerable."

"Most of the diggers are single men, are they not?"

"Well, no, sir, they ain't; they're mostly men with families, farmers, tradesmen, and shopkeepers, who have failed; and now and again broken-down gentlefolks who've seen better days."

This last sentence was spoken with a glance which seemed to apply the remark to the case in hand. Mr. Milner smiled in spite of himself.

"Like us you would say," he said.

"Well, sir, no offence; but I reckon when you take hold of a spade and pick it'll be the first time you've handled sich tools."

"You are right; but I have no intention of handling them myself, at least, not while native labour is obtainable."

"Oh, there's always boys enough to be had."

"So I have been told, and female servants to assist my daughters, shall I be able to get them easily?"

"You mean women to work in the kitchen. No, they ain't easy to get and they ain't no good when you do get 'em. I'd as soon take this old rake and stick it up in a kitchen and expect it to know how to work, as one o' them Korana or Griqua critters. They ain't more'n half human I don't believe. I've got a baboon that I brought down from the Limpopo once, and I tell you he's a sight more sensible than any one of 'em."

By the time two of the tents were pitched Mr. Smith made his appearance and began to unload the wagons with more haste than care. Kathie trembled for the safety of their property, as she watched him dashing trunks and boxes to the ground. Chips watched him too, and unwilling to interfere looked round for Mr. Milner, but seeing that he had wandered off to the top of the hill he called out to the man:

"Hold on there, Smith. I'll be along in a minute and lend you a hand." Smith made no reply, but continued to hurl down the boxes with rather more violence than before. "I say, Smith," he called again, "you'll be smashin' somethin' if you don't look out. I'll come and help you in a minute."

"I don't want your help," growled Smith. "But I've got to get into Kimberley day after to-morrow, and I mean to get off loaded before dark. If he don't like the way I'm doing it," he added, with a savage glance in Mr. Milner's direction, "he can come and do it himself."

Chips threw down his spade and going up to the wagon addressed the surly Jehu in his most conciliatory tones,

"Now, Jacob, what's the use o' tryin' to do in half an hour what's three hours' work. You won't get them things off loaded before dark nohow you like to fix it. Spose you let me help you get down the things they'll want to-night, and leave the rest. I'll be along here with my boys early in the mornin' and we'll get you off loaded in no time. It'll be a heap better than knockin' the things about to-night."

Smith did not condescend to reply, but Chips' words were evidently not without effect, for instead of hurling any more boxes to the ground he seated himself upon one and pulled out his pipe.

"Why can't you help me now?" he asked, when he had lighted it.

"Well, I would," replied Chips still conciliatory, "but you see, I want to get the other tents up, and these stones and thorns cleared away; the young ladies'll be strippin' their frocks on 'em."

Smith looked as if it would not trouble him much if they did, but he only answered, in a tone which implied that he was conferring a favour:

"Well, if you don't mind helping me in the morning I might as well wait till then. I'll take jolly good care I don't have any more to do with stuck-up English folks who treat me like the dirt under their feet;" and he bestowed another withering glance on Mr. Milner.

"All right, I'll be along fust thing in the mornin'. Seen Dickson lately? He was enquirin' after you a while ago."

"No, I haven't; and now I come to think of it he owes me something. I'll look him up. Don't forget to be along early. Good-night.'

"Good night," replied Chips, and with considerable satisfaction he watched Smith disappear over the hill, and then he returned to his self-imposed task.

Kathie watched him with a growing respect and appreciation of his energy and good-nature as he knocked in posts, fastened ropes, rolled away huge stones, chopped down bushes, and finally assisted the natives to carry in trunks and boxes.

"Well!" he exclaimed, stepping back when he had finished and gazing approvingly at his work. "It'll take a pretty good puff o' wind to knock them down, I reckon."

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "We are extremely obliged to you, Mr. Chips."

"You needn't to be, I've been right glad to help you. Where'll you have a fire made?"

"A fire!" she exclaimed, starting up. "Of course it is time to get tea ready. I suppose I shall learn to remember my duties in time, but I don't seem to do so at present. But to make a fire there must be something to make it of, and I don't see any wood here."

"Oh, there's plenty. Do you see them bushes?"

"Those sage-like bushes, with the greenish-yellow blossoms?"

"That's them; we burn nothing else on these diggings. Just chop 'em up—roots, leaves, flowers, and everything else—and pitch 'em on the fire. I tell you they'll burn. I don't say they won't smoke, but they'll burn, and that's the chief thing, ain't it? Shall I set them darkies o' yours to choppin' some. I'd set my boys too, but they won't work one minute after sundown."

"Oh, yes; send them if you please. Come, Pearl, you and I must get tea ready. See our dining-room is furnished already. Mr. Chips has brought in the table and chairs for us."

CHAPTER XII.

SPINNING YARNS.

BEFORE long the little camp presented a lively and picturesque appearance. The sun had not long gone down; but the sudden darkness of the south had already veiled the red, rocky hills in gloom. In the shadow of a clump of

trees Chips had built an enormous fire, and its red light shone full upon his strongly-marked features and strange costume as he knelt before the blaze broiling his fish. On the other side of the fire stood Mr. Milner, whose long overcoat and broad-brimmed hat gave him, in the flickering light, something of the appearance of a Spanish brigand. At a little distance the natives had built up another huge fire, which threw a bright light far around, and sent up a column of smoke and a shower of red sparks high into the air, while as near as they could get to the blaze, without actually roasting themselves, were Mr. Milner's two Kafirs and Chips's servants, talking in that low, dreamy tone which Kafirs always assume when under the influence of a fire and a pipe. Kathie stood for a long time in the tent door gazing at the half wild scene. Her artist eye took in every detail of the picture, from the clear, blue sky, set with myriads of stars, to the rocky hill below the camp lit up by the glare of the fires, and the low, bush-covered hill at the back, lying in densest shade, from which came every now and then the shrill cry of some belated bird.

There was a rustling in the bushes near her, but she was too much absorbed to notice it, and she was presently somewhat rudely awakened from the reverie into which she had fallen by a little clammy hand being thrust into hers. She drew her hand away quickly, and looking down she saw to her horror the dark, grotesquely-human face of a great baboon peering at her through the darkness, and the next moment he had seized her other hand in both of his. She gave an irrepressible cry of horror, trying at the same time to withdraw her hand from the hideous creature's tight clasp; but in vain. The more she pulled the more firmly he gripped. In a moment Chips was at her side, his hand on the baboon's neck.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "He's quite harmless, he wouldn't hurt you even if I was to tell him to. Get out, Adonis," he added, addressing the baboon, "the lady don't want to shake hands with the likes o' you. Get out, I say."

The baboon dropped Kathie's hand obediently and walked slowly off in the direction of the fire, turning half way to make a most hideous grimace at his master. He walked up to one of the natives, and snatching his hat placed it rakishly on one side of his own head, then, taking a pipe from the mouth of another, he sat down near the blaze and

began to smoke with a ludicrously solemn expression, which was irresistibly comical.

"He's rather imperdent in his manners," said Chips, regarding the creature with affectionate admiration, "but he's a good-hearted feller for all that. I hope he didn't frighten you much."

"I confess he did startle me a good deal. I thought in the first moment that he was a visitor from the lower regions. Does he belong to you?"

"Yes; I've had him nearly two years. I was huntin' up at the Limpopo, and one o' the Zulus who was with me wounded the critter jest for mischief. I couldn't abear to leave it lyin' there, so I took and doctored it, and it's been with me ever since, and we've grown mighty friendly, me and him. He's so sensible and intelligent and so quick to learn that if it wasn't dead again' scripter I'd be inclined to think them Darwin fellers was right in sayin' that our great-grandfathers was much the same kind o' critters as he is; but then it *is* again' scripter—dead again' it."

"Yes," replied Kathie gravely, and yet half smiling, "and against science, and against common sense."

"Well, as to science," said Chips, "I don't know much about that, but I've heard tell that the fellers as goes in for it don't think much o' scripter, and as to common sense, why every one's got different notions as to what constitoots common sense; but, as I was sayin', that baboon's got most *un*common good sense. He understands most o' what I say to him, and the best o' him is he never repeats a word of it; I can trust him, and that's more'n I can say for most humans. I'd be precious lonely if it wasn't for Adonis and for another pet that maybe you'd like better; he's prettier to look at, and most as fond o' me."

"And what is he?" asked Kathie.

"You'll see for yourself in a minute, ma'am; he won't stay at home long without Adonis; they're sworn friends. Ah! there he is already!" he exclaimed, pointing to where in the shadow of a tall vaal-bush a beautiful crane was standing. "Come here, Peter," he called; and the bird no sooner heard his voice than it ran forward with outspread wings and laid its graceful head on his hand. "What do you think of him?" asked Chips.

"He is very beautiful," she answered. "I can understand your affection for *him*. Have you had him long?"

"Only six months. No, he ain't such a old friend as

Adonis; but I'm real fond of him; he's such a loving critter, I never could ha' believed that a bird could be so sensible and affectionate. They're 'most the only friends I've got in the world—them two." And a cloud passed over the digger's face as he stroked the crane's slender neck.

"Is it long since you left America?" Kathie asked, feeling a growing interest in this strange man, whose manners were so rough and brusque, and whose heart seemed to be so soft.

"Well, it seems a good while to me, but it ain't quite six years since I sailed out o' Boston Harbour."

"Six years! You must be longing to see your friends again."

Chips laughed shortly. "I guess I'd be wishin' to see them if I had any to see," he said, "but I haven't. My father's dead and my mother and my sister; I've uncles and a hundred and ten cousins, more or less, but they—they ain't worth havin' in short. If I went back with ten thousand pounds in my pocket I'd find them friendly enough, I dare say; but if I was to go back as poor as I come away, there's no one as 'ud be particular glad to see me. I ain't very old, but I've lived long enough to lose every soul I cared for in the world."

"That is very hard," she said sympathisingly.

"Yes, it's hard; harder than you can think. I hope you'll never know what it is to lose them you care for," he added heartily.

"I know it already," she answered. "I have not lost all, thank God; but I have lost for ever more than one that I dearly loved."

Kathie was almost surprised at herself for talking so unreservedly to this man, whom she had never seen before. But the fact was that, half unconsciously to herself, she was a true reader of character. She had known somehow, before she had spoken half-a-dozen words to him, that Mr. Durwood was mean and deceitful, and the same unerring instinct now told her that this man with the dark, rugged face and free-and-easy manners was to be trusted, that he would scorn to dissemble, and that he would sooner cut off his right hand than utter a lie or betray a friend who trusted him.

They took tea presently in one of the tents, with a flickering lantern tied to each pole, and the stars shining down upon them through the canvas. During the meal, to which Mr. Milner insisted that Chips should remain, the latter told

many quaint stories of his life on the diggings, and adventures he had met with when hunting and when transport riding.

"Oh, yes; I've often hunted in the interior," he said, in answer to a question of Mr. Milner's. "Often and often in Matabeleland and Bechuanaland, right up to the Zambezi, and I've had lots o' sport and lots o' adventures."

"And narrow escapes too, I suppose?"

"That I have. I've been more'n once within an ace of havin' a crocodile's teeth in my leg, and as to lions, I've seen enough o' them, I tell you, sir. I once sat for two whole days and nights in a tree, with one o' them brutes sittin' down below, waitin' for me; and once I was lost for nearly a week in the bush in Bechuanaland, with not a drop o' water—fact I thought I was done for that time. But of all the narrer shaves I've had, about the narrerest was in Matebeleland, when the chief got hold o' me. You see, it was this way. I'd been told that I couldn't travel through his country without his permission; but that if I could get that I'd be all right; so like a green I went to his kraal to ask for it. Well, he didn't give it to me, as you may believe, but he didn't refuse it neither, and jest kep' me hangin' about for a couple o' weeks without givin' me a decided answer. At the end o' that time I went to him and asked him if he was unwillin' to let me go farther, at least to let me go home again. But that he refused point blank, and told me I was all right where I was. Well, I was mad; I wasn't afraid o' bein' killed, for I thought that if he had been goin' to kill me he could ha' done it before; but I was wild at bein' kep' there by him. I didn't say much, however; for it wasn't no use, so I jist kep' my eyes open, lookin' out for a chance of escape, and in the meantime made myself as comfortable as I could and learned the language from a young fellar who'd took a fancy to me. I shouldn't ha' had a bad time of it, if it hadn't been that I wanted to get away, for they gave me a hut to live in, and plenty o' pumpkin, honey, and sour milk to eat, and took me on hunters' trips with 'em, and once or twice when the chief paid a visit to other kraals he took me along with him. He thought, I s'pose, it made him look big to have a white prisoner in his train. I'd been there about three months, when one day the chief came back unexpected from a visit he'd been payin' somewheres. Well, as soon as I see him and his followers come into the kraal, I knew somethin' was up, so I jest kep' myself out o' their

way. Pretty soon the young Zulu as I'd got friendly with come into my hut, and says in a matter-o'-fact sort o' way, not as if he was givin' me warnin', or a hint, or anything o' that sort, 'The chief has heard that you was sent into the country by the Dutch to look for gold,' and after talkin' a bit he went out. That was a kind feller and a cute, and I knew what he meant as well as if he had said, 'You'd better clear out o' this or it'll be the worse for you.' So I laid down to make my plans. It was no use to try to get off in the day time I knew; but the nights were dark just then, and I decided to escape as soon after sundown as I could.

"I knew I'd hardly a ghost of a chance, for the Zulus are as sharp a'most as the red Injuns, and would most likely catch me before I'd got very far, but anything was better than waitin' quietly there to be killed. Well, to make a long story short, I waited till it got darkish. I forgot to tell you that the chief had called a council up at his place, to decide most likely how and when I was to be polished off. They thought I was quite ignorant of what was goin' on, or they'd ha' locked me up or set some one to watch me, but as it was they left me to myself. The young feller didn't come near me again. Every one knew that we'd been kind o' friends, and p'raps he was afraid o' bein' suspected, or p'raps he was ordered to keep away. At all events, no one came next or near me, and I stayed in my hut till it was quite dark; then I crawled out.

"My hut, fortunately, was near the outskirts of the village, and I slipped into the thickest shadder of a clump of trees, and looked about me.

"To start away without arms or food was to die as certain as to wait till mornin' would be, and to die o' starvation was to my mind 'most as bad as bein' stabbed to death. The hut nearest to mine belonged to an old rascal who'd always been uncivil to me, and who'd robbed me o' everything I'd possessed when I first come to the place. I thought there'd be no harm in robbin' him a bit in return. His hut looked dark and deserted, and in I crawled on my hands and knees. There was no one there, but in one corner stood an assagai. I took it at once and a flint and steel too. The old man and his boys had been out huntin' all the mornin' and there was a lot o' meat in the hut, but I wanted something that would be easier to carry and that wouldn't need cookin'; so I looked round, and by good luck found some biltong. You know what that is, meat dried in the sun till it's as hard as a board—

just the thing I wanted, and I helped myself without ceremony. In another corner there was a pile o' cakes made o' ground corn, and I filled my pockets with 'em. Besides these I took a knob kerri and a calabash o' milk, and then I was ready. It takes a long time to tell, but I wasn't above two minutes in that hut getting what I wanted, and then I crawled out again. There was a great noise at the chief's hut, but it was pretty quiet everywhere else.

"I crawled a long way on my hands and knees, and then I got up and ran. I had no compass, but I had the stars to guide me, and I started away to the south as fast as my legs would carry me. That was pretty fast, and for the first few hours I kep' up a sort o' trot, only stoppin' to listen every now and then. But I found I couldn't keep on at the pace I'd started at, for, you see, I hadn't been leadin' a very active life of late. Sittin' in the sun all day and drinkin' amasa wasn't exactly the best kind o' trainin' for the race I had to run, and about midnight I was quite knocked up; so I climbed up into a tree and took a rest, and then started on again.

"I walked on till it began to get light, and then I looked round for a place to spend the day in. There were plenty of big trees, but though I might be safe from lions in one of 'em, I shouldn't be safe from Zulus, and there was no thick bush that I could crawl into and hide. It was gettin' awful light, and I begun to think I'd better walk on and look for a better place, when I see something that decided me to stop where I was. There was a ridge o' high rocks in the hollow below where I was, grown all over with brambles and trailin' plants. I was starin' at them rocks, wonderin' if I couldn't crawl in among 'em and cover myself over somehow, when I see a goodish sized bird fly from under one of 'em. I rushed to the place and peeped into the place it had come out of, and I see that all under the rock was holler—quite a little cave—but choked up with creepers and birds' nests. I tell you it didn't take me long to creep into that there place, and once in I felt that I was safe from everything but snakes. I concealed the opening with rocks and trailers till it couldn't be discovered from the outside, and then I laid down to sleep.

"About midday I woke up. It was powerful hot in that place, and I was most suffocated, and half a mind to clear out and risk being caught, but I decided to hold on a bit longer. It seemed to me that that afternoon

would never come to an end, but at last the sun went down, and I knew that very soon it would be dark. It was pretty dark already in my cave, but not so dark but that I could see. Just as I was about to crawl out I saw a tremendous snake lyin' across the openin'. I couldn't get out without steppin' over him, and as I couldn't step over him without wakin' him, I knew I'd have to fight him. He was a big feller, and I didn't relish havin' to tackle him at such close quarters, but there was no help for it, so I gave him a dig with my assagai by way o' rousin' him up. Well, I've had a good many fights with snakes in my time, but I never see such a feller as him; instead o' me fightin' him he was fightin' me. I had to act on the defensive all the time. He jest curled his tail round one o' the roots that grew across the roof of the cave and threw himself at me, and I had to back into the furthest corner to get out o' his way. He was a horrid sight with his scaly back and his forked tongue movin' from side to side, and his eyes in the half light lookin' like green fire. I almost began to believe that he was a devil that couldn't be killed. I struck him with my assagai, and hit him, and poked at him, and still he fought on, and I had literally to cut him into bits before he'd give in and allow me to kill him. Well, that critter, though he nearly took my life, was the means o' saving it, for I had just finished polishin' him off and was about to roll the stones away from the openin' of the cave, when I heard steps and voices approachin'. I crawled into the darkest corner slick enough, and puttin' my ear to a crack listened. The talkers came up and sat down on the very next rock to mine. I hadn't listened above two minutes before I found that they were Zulus and huntin' for me. If it hadn't been for that snake a detainin' me I should have crawled out just in time to run agin' them. I almost blessed the critter, though I'd been cussin' him a few minutes before. Presently the Zulus began to gather wood and make a fire, and I saw that they meant to stay a good while, for they commenced cuttin' up meat and cookin' it. I understood from their talk that they had orders from the king to put an end to me wherever they found me.

"I was half-minded to jump out and try whether I couldn't outrun 'em, for the idee o' bein' killed like a rat in a hole wasn't exactly pleasant, but I thought p'raps I'd better hold on a bit, for they seemed more intent on cookin'

their supper than anything else, and I began to hope that they'd go off afterwards or go to sleep. They talked all the time they was eatin' in that low, sleepy tone they always speak in when when they're squattin' round a fire enjoyin' theirselves, and I couldn't hear what they said, but I guessed 'twas about me. By-and-bye the supper was over, and they got close together, and seemed to be holdin' a council of war. I made out a few words here and there, and found some wanted to go on and the others to stay.

"'Have we time to stay to eat and sleep,' asked one, 'while the white man gets farther and farther away? Did not the chief tell us to search night and day till we found him? Are we obeying him when we spend hours eating and resting? Some o' them agreed with him; seized their assegais and sprung up; but one who looked to be the oldest told them to sit down again and listen to him. 'Were we not awake all last night?' he asked them. 'Have we not walked all day to day? Is not this the first meal we have eaten since yesterday? Do we not need a few hours' rest?'

"'Rest,' said the other savagely. 'Are we boys that we cannot walk one day without needing rest?' and he glared at him as if he would ha' liked to eat him, but the old chap didn't look at all put out, and went on quietly.

"'A few hours' rest will refresh us, and make us able to travel fast. The white man has doubtless rested all day. If he is fresh and strong, and we are tired and worn out, shall we catch him, think you? No, let us rest till the moon rises, and then we look for the white man, and we shall find him.'

"'Yes, we shall soon find him,' said the voice of the young Zulu who had always been my friend; 'we shall find him if he is alive. But is he alive? Does my father remember the bones we found this morning? Were they not his bones, and have not the lions already eaten him?'

"I was comforted by hearin' his voice, for I guessed he wouldn't find me if he could help it; for if he hadn't wanted me to escape he wouldn't ha' warned me to make off as he had, and I felt I had a friend at court, as the sayin' is, though he was a young and not very powerful one. They talked and argued for a long time, and at last they decided to rest awhile. I was awful glad, but I wasn't allowed to be glad long, for I'm blessed if they didn't roll themselves up in their mats and lay down jest below my

rock, jest where I'd have to step on 'em if I got out. I almost give up then, but I says to myself, 'Towser Chips, you're a fool. God ain't delivered you out o' a hundred dangers to forsake you at last, and if it's His will that you're to die here in this savage land, and your bones to lay bleachin' in the sun, why, remember its been the fate of many a better man, and don't disgrace your name and nation by whimperin' over it,' and after that I felt a bit better. I kep' my eye to the openin', and watched one after another of the rascals fall asleep. At last they was all off but my young friend; he seemed to try to sleep, and at last to give it up as a bad job, and gettin' up softly so as not to disturb the others, he began to build up the fire, and then he settled down in front of it. I wondered if 'twould be safe to trust him. He had seemed to be my friend, but would I, if I managed to get past the others without wakin' 'em, dare to pass him? Would he not rouse up the other, and join in the chase after me? I couldn't make up my mind. But presently I see the young chap roll himself up and lay down in front o' the fire, and without waiting to think about it, I moved away the stones, and wriggled out like a snake. I stepped over the sleepin' niggers as soft as any Injun without wakin' 'em up, and crawled into the shadder o' the rocks. If one of them fellers had waked up, my life wouldn't ha' been worth the snap o' your fingers, but not one o' em stirred. I had still to go past the fire in its full glare, and the young Zulu was lyin' so that I must step right over him, and I knew he was a light sleeper. I could hardly fail to wake him up, and if he proved faithful to his king, I was a dead man. I had no time to lose, however, so I stepped up to him and over him, hardly darin' to breathe. He didn't stir; but I *felt* he wasn't asleep. He didn't move, but something else did, and lookin' down, I see what I hadn't noticed before; curled up beside him was one o' them lean, hungry curs that the niggers always keep about 'em. It woke up, and was jist opening its great ugly jaws to bark, when, with the strength o' the devil himself, I seized the brute's throat in my hands, stiflin' his bark, and then, with his neck still fast, I lifted it off the ground and carried it off with me. I went for hours without even stoppin' to let the dog down, and when I did stop, if you'll believe me, sir, it was as dead as a door nail."

Mr. Milner thought, looking at the great muscular hands that Chips held up, that he could readily believe it.

"And had you reached a place of safety by that time?" he asked with interest.

"Yes, I was pretty safe from the Zulus by that time; and after I'd travelled about alone for a few days, I met in with a party of hunters, and came down along with them. But lor', sir!" he exclaimed, starting up all at once; "what did you let me sit here so long spinnin' yarns for? I can see you're tired and wantin' to turn in." And scarcely waiting for Mr. Milner to reply, he called his two strangely-assorted companions, and hurried away.

Kathie did not get to sleep till after midnight; her surroundings were too quaint and unaccustomed; and she lay awake listening to the strange loud voices of wakeful birds and insects, the stealthy rustling of the wind among the vaal-bushes, and other and less musical sounds which came from the direction of the town or village of Hebron. At last she fell asleep with the murmur of the river in her ears, and dreamed that she was by the sea again. When she awoke she fancied that she had only been asleep a few minutes, and was surprised upon looking at her watch to find that it was past five o'clock. She sprang up, shivering in the crisp, cold air, which found such free ingress into the tent. When she went out she saw the two wagons which belonged to the surly Smith, and their loads piled up under the vaal-bushes, There was no sign of their friend of the night before, but Kathie was sure that she had heard his unmistakable voice speaking Kafir outside. She went to the tent where they had taken tea on the previous evening, and to her surprise she found that the chairs and table had been carried out, and a heap of red clods had been piled up in the middle of the floor.

"I wonder—" she was beginning in astonishment when Mr. Chips appeared in the doorway with a hearty—

"Good mornin', miss, and how do you like the look o' the diggins by daylight?"

"It is hardly daylight yet, is it?" she answered, smiling. "I could discern nothing but the hills and the outlines of the bushes. I am sorry you got up so early to attend to our affairs, Mr. Chips."

"You needn' to be; 'taint a morsel earlier than I always get up, and I'd admire to see you fixed up snug. I expect you're wonderin' what that dirt's for."

"I was wondering whether it was intended for use or ornament."

"It's meant for use; but I guess when I've finished it'll be some ornament too. It's smashed up ant-heaps. You see we break it up, and roll and hammer it fine, and put it on the floor; then throw water on it, and roll it again; then throw more water on it and roll it smooth with stones, and when it's dry it's as hard a'most as a brick. Every one makes floors of it here—every one that likes to take the trouble that is—and very few of the farmhouses in the Transvaal and Free State have any other kind."

Mr. Chips made his Kafirs' work hard and he himself worked harder, and by the time Kathie and Pearl had prepared the very late dinner the little camp looked quite habitable.

After the meal they all went to look at the claims and be initiated into the mysteries of diamond digging. Kathie was surprised to find that a claim meant a square hole about two feet deep, surrounded by heaps of stones, sand, and gravel, with four large tubs at one end raised upon stones, and at the other end a long-shaped wooden frame with a large seive slung inside of it by means of short chains, which Towser Chips told them was a "baby."

"Why is it called a 'baby'?" Pearl asked.

"I don't know, unless it's because it's shaken like a baby in a cradle. This is how we work it. You see this little, round, coarse sieve on top o' the big, fine one. Well, into it we throw all the stuff we dig out, and when the 'baby's' shook, all the sand and finer stones fall through into the large sieve, the sand sifts through that, and the gravel runs down the sieve and makes a heap in front of the 'baby'—understand? That's the stuff we find the diamonds in."

"And do you never find them among the larger stones left in the round sieve?" she asked, much interested.

"Not often; you see, unless they're a pretty good size, they fall through into the big sieve and run down on to the heap. When we've sifted or 'babied' a lot o' stuff we put it, a little at a time, into a sieve and wash it—twist it about in a tub o' water, you know; and when it's washed we gravitate it. I can't tell you how that's done, but I'll show you as soon as I've got some stuff ready. When its gravitated you turn the sieve over on to a smooth place—generally on top of a tub full of gravel—and if there's a diamond in the sieve it'll be lyin' right on top and right in the middle."

"It must be rather nice work," said Pearl; "I'll come and shake papa's 'baby' for him when he gets one."

"But that's the last part of the work, and the easiest—the babyin' and gravitatin', the diggin', pickin', rakin,' and scrapin' comes before that. No, I guess you won't think it nice work by the time you've seen a little more o' it."

"The place seems to be very quiet," said Mr. Milner, glancing along the side of the kopje, where only one or two diggers were to be seen. "There are usually more people busy here, are there not?"

"As a rule there's more. There's a good many on top of the kopje—Hebron Kopje this is—but a good many has gone across the river lately."

"Are the diamonds more plentiful on the other side?"

"So they say. I don't think so. Some fellow found a decent stone there, and they all rushed after it; that's about all it amounts to, I guess. I dare say they'll be back again in a day or two."

Chips took them to the top of the kopje, from which a view of the town could be obtained. It consisted of one long stoney street, with houses and shops on each side—a dismal, dusty, sleepy-looking place, with nothing of life, bustle, or prosperity about it. Great heaps of red sand were close up against most of the houses, and many of the square, shallow claims were almost in the street itself. Diggers' tents were dotted about among the houses and over the high kopje at the back of the town, and all wore an air of dreariness and discomfort, which impressed Kathie even more unfavourably than on the evening before. How very unlike it was in every respect to the bright picture Mr. Durwood had painted for them! Where were the bright, healthy children, the jolly prosperous diggers, and the pleasant dwellings he had described? Kathie saw nothing like them anywhere.

Among the many children she saw playing about amongst the dogs and chickens before the tents, very few were tidily dressed or healthy looking, and most of the men at work in the claims seemed to her to have a worn, weather-beaten look, which would not lead one to suppose that diamond digging was the pleasant, profitable employment Mr. Durwood had declared it to be.

She looked from one to another of the claims and wondered if her proud, fastidious brother were working in the midst of one of those gangs of dirty, noisy natives, and she

decided that it was not possible. Gerald neither could, nor would live such a life among such surroundings.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked Chips, going to her side as she stood contemplating the claims and diggers with deepening gravity and dissatisfaction.

"Not much," she answered. "It is not at all like what I expected; I thought a digger's camp was a lively, bustling, populous place."

"So it ought to be. Oh, this Hebron ain't like most diggers' camps, I guess, its a sleepy concern. I suppose 'twas different in the early days, but there's nothin' here now to bustle about. You won't stay here long, Miss Milner, I reckon."

"I hope not," she replied earnestly. The thought of spending many months in this rocky, forlorn place was by no means pleasant.

Poor Kathie! she little knew how long and how full of trouble her life on the diggings was to be.

CHAPTER XIII.

LENA BERNHARDT.

A FORTNIGHT later Kathie was sitting at the tent door watching the slow, lazy movements of the tall powerfully-built Zulu who was washing up the dinner plates in the kitchen. From the ponderous son of Ham, whose heavy languor and tuneless song were alike irritating, her eyes wandered after a time away to the wavy, purple line of hills opposite. They had ceased to look strange to her now; she had already grown familiar with the bold, square hill on the other side of the river, behind which the sun rose, with the long, low, bush-covered hills, with the glaring gravel heaps, with the agates, crystals, and the hundred and one varieties of beautiful stones of which, like every new comer to the diggings, she had begun to make a collection, with the odd, clever little mearkats, that sat up on their hind legs and stared, blinked, and nodded at her, waved their long, bushy tails in the air, and disappeared into their holes with lightning speed at the slightest movement. She had grown accustomed also to the sudden, violent whirlwinds, which came rushing down the road two or three times a day, shaking the ropes and canvas, upsetting

plates and dishes, pouring volumes of red sand into the tent, and leaving her hatless and breathless. She was getting used to the manner of life of a diamond digger and dweller in tents, yet feeling more and more every day its contrast to the life that was past, and more doubtful and uneasy as to the future. It was a hard, rough life, but she had not yet realised how hard and rough it could be, its very strangeness and novelty prevented that. She felt that in time the loneliness and dulness and absence of all educated, cultivated people of her own class would be very hard to bear. But in Cape Town she had contrived to put aside her own troubles and lose herself in study and in care for others, and she could do it here she imagined. That books were not always procurable, and that care for others when they are our dearest and best-beloved, with whose lives and hopes our own are inextricably entwined, becomes sometimes a crushing weight—an overwhelming avalanche, which falls upon us, crushing heart, mind, and hope beneath it—she had yet to learn. She did not know that a time was coming by contrast with which the darkest hours of the past would be almost bright. She did not dream that poverty and want were very near to them who had never yet felt a shadow of it, with whom, as far at least as all material comforts and luxuries went, it had been but to wish and to have. It did not occur to her as remotely possible that before long the frail tents, worn and torn by ceaseless flapping in the wind, by pouring rain and hail and burning sun, would be worn out, and new ones utterly unobtainable; that clothes would be worn threadbare and money to buy more not forthcoming; and that health, strength, and spirits would give way under the strain of constant care and disappointment and hope deferred that maketh the heart sick; and that starvation, gaunt, grim, and undisguised, would stare them in the face.

Kathie knew nothing, and guessed nothing, of what lay before her in the mercifully-hidden future; but as her eyes wandered over the landscape, from the low hills with their quivering purple haze to the shining patch of river visible from where she sat, and then to the red line of Hebron Kopje, from which direction came the rattling sound of babies, a strange feeling of fear came over her, and she shivered in the bright sunshine—as people are said to do when someone treads upon their future graves.

Presently across the dazzling whiteness of the limestone

road which leads to the top of Natal Kopje she saw a slight, black-robed figure approaching. It was the figure of a lady and evidently a young one. Kathie had not seen the face of a white woman since her arrival in Hebron two weeks before, and it was, therefore, with unusual interest that she watched the graceful figure and with great pleasure that she saw that the lady was coming towards her tent.

It was a very pleasant face that smiled down at Kathie from under the shadow of a broad-brimmed hat, and a very pleasant voice that asked:

"Is this Milner's?"

Kathie answered in the affirmative and invited her visitor into the tent.

"Oh, no thank you," replied the young lady. "I should much prefer sitting out here. I am such a lover of the open air, and it is so seldom that one can sit outside at this season without having one's hat carried away, or one's hair blown off one's head."

"It seems so, indeed. I began to despair of ever having a quiet day. Surely it does not blow all the year road."

"Oh, no; it is never quite so bad as at this time of year, and one gets used to it in time. You will find the flapping of the canvas and shaking of the ropes irritate you much less six months hence than they do now."

"I hope so. I presume you have lived here long enough to grow accustomed to the winds and all the other evils which appear to be inseparable from tent life."

"Yes, we have lived here three years, my brother Gabriel and I—I beg your pardon, I am quite forgetting to introduce myself to you. I am Helena Bernhardt, and my brother and I live in the little reed and iron house on the side of the river; you noticed it, doubtless, when you crossed the river."

"The little house standing in a small garden, with a clump of bushes growing near the gate? Yes, I remarked it as the one comfortable and picturesque-looking dwelling on the banks of the river."

"I am afraid it is," said Miss Bernhardt, her bright eyes clouding. "One sees little besides squallor and poverty here, and while enduring privations and unaccustomed hardships oneself, one has the knowledge that one's neighbours are nearly all worse off."

"It does seem as if comfort and prosperity were the exception here and not the rule, and yet we were assured that the contrary was the case. I am afraid that you were

deceived as we were before we came, though of course things were not at quite such a low ebb three years ago as they are now. We should have left long ago if we had depended for a living upon the diamonds we find; but we have an annuity—a small one, but sufficient to keep us in comparative comfort; and how do you think you shall like the diggings, Miss Milner?"

"I am afraid," said Kathie, with a little sigh which she could not repress, "that when the novelty has quite worn off, we shall have nothing left but regrets that we ever came here. I fear already that we made a great mistake when we left Cape Town."

"Cape Town!" exclaimed Miss Bernhardt. "Did you come from Cape Town? I beg your pardon, but I under- that you had just come from England. I am sure Mr. Chips said so."

"He was right in saying that we are from England, but it is two years since we left it, and we have been living in Cape Town since then."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said the young lady. "You do not seem half so much of a stranger now that I know you have lived in dear old Cape Town. What would I not give to see it again?"

"It was your home?"

"No, not my home, that was at the Paarl; but I was educated in Cape Town, and the happiest years of my life were spent there. I fancy I shall never love any other place one half so well."

And so Miss Bernhardt chatted on with a bright, frank unreserve which seemed to be natural to her and which, as it was far removed from freedom or undue communicativeness, was very winning, and before they parted Kathie felt more as if she were an old friend than a stranger. She described with a loving minuteness her old home at the Paarl with its vineyards and shady gardens, her school life which had been brought to a sudden end by a summons home to her father's death-bed. His death had been followed only a few weeks later by that of her mother, and she and her brother had been left alone.

"That was seven years ago," she said, in conclusion, "and Gabriel and I have lived together ever since. We lived on the old farm for a year after our parents died, but it never seemed like home, and my brother's health grew very delicate. I thought he would be better away from the

place where every thing reminded him continually of our loss and I tried to persuade him to sell the farm. He would not do so for a long time, but we had a good many money losses: his health grew worse and worse, and the management of the farm and vineyard became too much for him. At last he yielded to my persuasions and sold the old home, with what regret you can imagine. My brother obtained a situation as secretary to a gentleman who had been a friend of my father, and I became a teacher in the school where I was educated. Our leisure time we spent together and in study. For three years we lived thus, and then, the up-country climate being recommended for Gabriel, we came here."

So this bright-faced girl had known sorrow and adversity; had left a home she loved; was far from her childhood's friends. Kathie would never have guessed it; her smile was so bright; her fair brow was so smooth; her dark, soft eyes so calm and bright. There was something fascinating in her restful, strong and quiet expression, which fascinated Kathie.

Sweet, refined, and graceful, there was nothing conventional about Helena Bernhardt. Her thoughts flowed in a channel of their own; her words were not other peoples' words. Even in the matter of dress she was different from other young ladies; for whereas every other woman wore full, flowing, widely distended skirts, Miss Bernhardt's dress fell in straight, classic folds about her tall, slim figure, and her dark, satiny hair, instead of being piled up on top of her head, was smoothly braided at the back. Not that she was what is called a strong-minded woman, who took a pride in looking unlike other people. When the fashion was graceful and becoming she wore it, and when it was not she ignored it: and somehow, whatever she wore, whether it was simple or elaborate, white or black, fashionable or otherwise, it always struck people as just the most appropriate thing she could have worn.

Lena Bernhardt had learned some of life's hardest lessons and the learning had been bitter, but it had left no bitterness behind. Wiser, stronger, better, more full of love and sympathy for others; more full of faith in God had she grown during the years of cloud and storm which had been hers. All the sorrows as well as all the joys of her life she had taken as coming straight from the hand of God, and that was probably the secret of her cheerfulness and her

bright, unfailing interest in everything and everyone around her. Trusting in his promises; depending on his strength; humbly trying to obey his commands, and living her life from day to day, she had little temptation or time for sad communings with her own heart, or pensive retrospective reveries, weakening alike to heart and mind. All this, of course, Kathie did not learn in this, her first interview with Lenah, but she learned it afterwards, and much more that won her love and admiration.

"There is not a church or chapel here, then?" said Kathie in reply to some remark of Miss Bernhardt's.

"No, I'm sorry to say there is not. I am afraid that the diggers could never raise funds to build a church or pay a minister."

"Then you never enjoy a service unless you go to Kimberley?"

"Oh yes, we do. A clergyman from Barkly preaches here sometimes, and occasionally a Wesleyan minister from Kimberley. The services are held in the dining-room of the principal hotel; but it is only very seldom that they come. We who belong to the Dutch Church are more fortunate, for we are able to go to the church at Warrenton sometimes."

"Where is Warrenton? I have never heard of it."

"It is a little village eighteen or twenty miles from here, on the river. Hebron draws all its supplies of fruit and vegetables from there. It is a nice little place. Mrs. Hout, a friend of mine, lives near there on a farm. She is such a nice person—I'm sure you would like her. 'One of the grains of the salt of the earth' my brother calls her. She will be in to-morrow evening to attend the meeting. Oh! by-the-bye, that is partly why I came to see you this afternoon. A few friends meet at our house once a week to have prayer and singing, and my brother or one of the others reads a sermon or a chapter of the Bible. I came to-day to ask if you will join us to-morrow evening. I should be so glad if you would come. If your father does not care for the walk, my brother and I will come up and escort you."

"You are very kind. Papa is not strong, and will not care for the walk, I know, after a long tiring day in the claim; but my little brothers will be quite sufficient escort; I may take them with me?"

"Oh, certainly, bring them by all means. I had for-

gotten that Mr. Chips told me that you had a sister and two little brothers—where are they?"

"Pearl is inside studying, the boys are on the kopje collecting agates. I intended that they should begin their studies to-day, but they pleaded so hard for another week's holiday, that I was unable to refuse them."

"Are you their teacher?"

"Yes, I have been for the last two years."

"And do you like it?—teaching I mean;—I used to grow so weary of it."

"Oh yes, I like it; that is, I do not think that I like teaching in the abstract, but I love teaching them: it is the greatest pleasure I have."

"Do you find more pleasure in teaching than in studying yourself?"

"Yes, I think so; it takes one more out of one's self. One cannot let one's thoughts wander far when one is explaining grammar or Euclid."

Miss Bernhardt glanced at her and read more than she dreamed in the words, and the sad, half-bitter tone in which they were spoken; and she wondered what was the trouble that had brought that weary look into the English girl's fair face, and made her fear to let her thoughts wander. But, brightly turning the conversation, she talked of other things. She was wonderfully well informed, and for a colonial girl astonishingly well read. With English and Dutch literature she was well acquainted, and talked of books like one who loved them; and Kathie learned, in the course of the conversation, that she drew and painted, and that music was her darling hobby.

"I love music," she said; "I sometimes think that I love it too much. I forget every sorrow, care, and ungratified wish while listening to good music. It is a positive pain to me to hear a poor or mediocre performance. My love for music is an inheritance, I suppose, for my father and mother were excellent musicians."

"I fear you have few opportunities of gratifying your taste here," said Kathie.

"Very few—none at all in fact. We have been to several concerts in Kimberley, but they fell—oh! so far short of what they ought to be. Are you musical? I can see you are?"

"I love music dearly, and I play the piano and the harp, what is called well, I believe; but I have not the passionate

love for music that you have, and that my sister and my little brother, Sydney, have. They delight in sweet sounds, and master with ease exercises and studies which I learned to manage only after weeks of hard practice. Once seated at the piano, Pearl wants nothing else."

"She is like me," said Lena; "I was in danger at one time of making quite a god of music, and would have cultivated it to the exclusion of every other study and pursuit; but my brother showed me the folly of my conduct. He insisted on my reading German with him, and beginning the study of Italian."

They talked for some time longer, and then Lena rose to go. "It is time I hastened home," she said, "for I see our mutual friend, Mr. Chips, returning from his claim, and I know he never leaves off work until late;" and she pointed to where the tall figure of the Yankee was seen coming up the road, his crane walking with erect head and dainty steps close beside him, and the baboon following leisurely, mimicing his master's peculiar swinging gait with ludicrous exactness.

"My father has not returned yet," said Kathie. "I will walk to the foot of the hill with you, and meet him. Come, Pearl!"

The sun had set by the time they reached the parched flat that stretches between the bottom of Natal Kopje and the river, and the red glow, flung by its setting rays mingling with the silvery light of the nearly full moon, threw a peculiar, softened beauty over the kopjes, with their masses of red rocks, toning down their hard rugged outlines, and upon the ugly, thorny shrubs, the sweet, subtle odour of whose tiny, creamy blossoms filled all the air.

"What a change a few minutes can make," Kathie exclaimed, as they all paused involuntarily. "A little while ago all the landscape was red and dazzling; it made one's eyes ache and one's head swim to look at it: and now it is all lovely, silvery, dreamlike."

"Yes," said Lena, speaking more to herself than to her companions, and her dark eyes resting dreamily on the line of low hills to the south eastward, which were drawing a a soft mantle of mist about them, "it is lovely, and yet how little, comparatively, we should appreciate all this cool, restful beauty, if it were not for the heat, noise, and glare that went before. It is always so, I think, with everything. Certainty never seems so delightful as after

long tossing about on a sea of doubt and suspense. How doubly safe appears safety after we have just passed through danger, and we never so thoroughly appreciate love and consideration as after we have been suffering coldness and neglect, so that—but, dear me," she added, breaking off suddenly with a laugh, and blushing a little, "I have no time to stand her moralising while my poor Gabriel is waiting for his tea. Goodnight, Miss Milner; I shall see you to-morrow evening, I hope, but I shall not consider that by coming to the meeting you have returned my call, and I shall expect to see you again very soon."

"I shall come," answered Kathie. "Your visit has given me too much pleasure for me to wish to be too long in returning it. I was positively pining for the sight of a civilized face, though I did not know it."

Mr. Milner had dismissed his Kafirs, and was standing leaning on his "baby," when Kathie and Pearl reached his claim. His head was bent, and his eyes fixed on the distant landscape with an unseeing gaze, which told how far from the present scene were his thoughts. His white clothes were reddened with sand and splashed with mud, and he looked weary and dispirited. How different, how very different, from the genial squire of Blackwood Hall. A pang of sorrow and fear shot through Kathie's heart as she noticed how old and worn he looked, and how thin was the hand that rested on the "baby."

He came out of his reverie and smiled at the two girls as they sprang lightly down the bank into the claim.

"Well," he said, putting an arm around each and beginning to walk in the direction of home, "and how have things gone to-day? Does your elephantine cook continue to behave well?"

"Yes, papa, he understands his duties. He is provokingly slow to be sure, but I daresay he will improve, or perhaps I shall lose my English energy in time and cease to be irritated by his slowness. We have had a visitor, papa."

"Indeed! You would just as soon have been spared the infliction, I imagine."

"Oh, no, indeed papa. I have quite fallen in love with her. It is a long time since I enjoyed a stranger's society so much as I have hers this afternoon."

"I am very glad, dear, if you have found a friend," he said half sadly. "You have been lonely enough during the

past two years. Who is this charming young lady—she is a young lady, I presume ? "

"Yes, a young Dutch lady. Her name is Helena Bernhardt, and she and her brother live in that picturesque little reed house near the river. She has invited us to attend a prayer-meeting there to-morrow evening, and we have promised to go, if you do not object."

"Go, by all means, Kathie, if you wish; if you can find any interest, pleasure, or amusement in this benighted hole do not hesitate to take it; it will be little enough, I fancy."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DIGGERS' MEETING.

ALL day Wednesday the hot north-west wind blew steadily, laden with suffocating red dust and powdered stone. Violent whirlwinds chased each other down the road, and a red cloud hung over the diggings. The sun beat fiercely down with scorching heat, making the great red boulders glow as with internal fires, and the steely flint and broken fragments of crystal, catching his rays, flashed and sparkled like points of flame. Everything one looked at seemed to be crying out for moisture. It was a day which made one long for just one glimpse of a grey, cloudy sky, clear murmuring water and cool, green grass. Every now and then when a whirlwind of more than usual violence shook and nearly overturned the tent in which she sat, or she caught sight of the red cloud of dust that veiled the kopjes, Kathie caught herself longing passionately for the blue, silver-fringed breakers, and fresh, salt breath of the ocean which she had learned to love so well, and which it tantalised her to know was lying pure and fresh as ever, so very far from all this dust, heat and glare.

But at last when the sun went down, the wind hushed itself suddenly. In an instant every leaf, pebble, and blade of grass became as motionless as a moment before they had been wildly tossed about. The bright red glare that had hung over the kopjes all day changed to a soft purplish crimson haze. The poor scorched earth seemed to drink in with delight the floods of cool silver light which the great full moon poured down upon it; and over hills, town and river

there came a hush and silence inexpressibly soothing to tired irritated nerves.

"Oh, how delightful!" exclaimed Pearl, throwing down the book she had been studying and joining Kathie in the kitchen, where she stood before the smoky vaal-bush fire making tea, a task which never could be left to the cook. "We shall be able to go to Miss Bernhardt's after all, sha'nt we Kathie."

"I think so; but it is growing chilly, will it not be too cold for you?"

"Oh, no; I can wrap up. I am pining for a long walk, and I want to see the river by moonlight. I am so tired of these dusty, flapping tents. I shall die or go mad or something if that horrid, hot wind blows for many days longer."

"Don't do that," said Kathie, smiling. "We must put up with it a little longer. Mr. Chips says the weather will be much pleasanter next month."

"Yes, and a month after the rainy season begins, he says. I am afraid of it. Can you imagine what this place will be like in wet weather?"

"Never mind," said Kathie, cheerfully. "We will not worry about it till it comes, and then we will bear it as best we can. Perhaps by that time we shall be back at Mosswood again. I don't think papa will care to live in this way very long. Come now, let us have tea and get ready for the meeting; we shall not have too much time."

Half an hour later they set out down the white road, accompanied by Sydney. It had been deemed too cold for Olive, and Mr. Milner had declined to go. They walked quickly and soon found themselves at the gate of the reed-house. For a little while they stood still to look at the broad, placid river which reflected the glittering, star-studded sky; and listening to its deep, restful murmur, and then somewhat loath to leave the outside freshness and beauty, Kathie pushed open the small gate and knocked at the canvas door. It was opened by Miss Bernhardt herself, who gave them a most cordial welcome and led the way to an inner room where the company was assembled. Not a very large company; only six or eight weather-beaten men, and four or five sunburnt, worn-looking women, and several children were seated on the rough forms and chairs around the room.

A square table covered with a red cloth, on which were several bibles and hymn-books, stood in the middle of the gravel floor, a piano was at the top of the room, the reed walls were hung with a dark cretonne and adorned with pictures and brackets, on the latter of which were arranged little pyramids of agates and lumps of quartz and crystal. In one corner was a rough set of shelves filled with books.

At the top of the table stood a tall, intellectual-looking young man, whom Lena introduced as her brother. He was very unlike her in appearance—grave, somewhat delicate-looking, and rather shy, it was only when he smiled that any resemblance to his bright-faced sister could be traced, and he very seldom smiled.

"Clever," Kathie pronounced, mentally. "Clever and good, but not one half so nice as his sister."

But if she was disappointed in him, the feeling was by no means mutual.

"What a lovely face," he thought to himself. "But why that sad expression?" And glancing at the simple, but very graceful and stylish dresses of the two girls: "What do such people want in Hebron? They will not stay long."

He had not much time for making observations, however, for the few laggards for whom he had been waiting arrived, and he was obliged to begin the service. A short prayer, deep, fervent, heartfelt, came first; then a hymn which Miss Bernhardt played on the piano, throwing wonderful sweetness and feeling into the simple air, while Towser Chips, whom until then Kathie had failed to see, played a violin accompaniment spiritedly and well. Kathie did not sing, but Pearl and Sydney did, and as their sweet, clear young voices rose and fell in perfect taste and time, several admiring and curious glances were cast in their direction.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one young man, twisting himself round in his seat in order to get a better view of Kathie. "I wonder who they are. Those are what I call good-looking girls, now; stylish too, and all that sort of thing. The little one's the best looking, but I don't care for school-girls, they're so apt to be pert and conceited. I'd give a bob to know where they came from. Swell out and out they are, by Jove!"

This young man, who had been among the last arrivals, was not a digger, and felt himself vastly superior to any one

who shook a "baby" or handled a sieve. He was dressed in a brand new suit of a somewhat pronounced pattern, and displayed a large amount of white collar and cuff and bright blue necktie. He had very light, carefully-brushed hair, light, steely grey eyes, and a fair, florid complexion. He prided himself on what he called his "smartness in taking people's measure." According to his "measurement," Gabriel Bernhardt was a sanctimonious prig; his sister a rather clever, very cold-hearted girl, who would have been handsome if she had not been so sunburnt and had had more "style" (Mr. Parkins had a great weakness for "style"), Towser Chips was nothing more nor less than an ignorant clown. It is needless to say that Mr. Parkins' own soul would have fitted easily into a thimble, while his mind would have found ample room in a pill-box of the smallest dimensions. He stroked his tow-coloured moustache and fidgeted about in his seat, wishing that Kathie would look in his direction, and observe the admiration with which he was regarding her. That she would have been gratified by his notice and flattered by the admiration of "the most gentlemanly looking fellow" in the room, he never for an instant doubted.

Meanwhile Kathie, blissfully unconscious of the attention her fair face and fashionably-made frock were attracting, was listening to Gabriel Bernhardt. Some voices sound best when they sing, others when they laugh, others never sound so well as when reading, and Mr. Bernhardt's was one of the latter. Kathie could not help thinking that he had missed his vocation when he became a diamond digger.

"He should have been a clegyman," she thought, as she watched his flushing cheek and earnest eye as he read simply and unaffectedly, without any gesture or mannerism, the sixth of Matthew, and then one of De Witt Talmage's noble, spirited, practical sermons. After the reading came more singing, simple, grand old hymns, the words and tunes of which were familiar to every one, and in which all the company joined, not even excepting the spruce young clerk, Mr. Parkins, who was possessed of a very pleasant voice, but who did not as a rule permit it to waste its sweetness on the desert air of a "diggers' meeting." He sang to-night only because he fancied that there were those in the company who were capable of appreciating the "style" which Mr. G—— of King William's Town had so carefully drilled into him. He

lingered when the service was over, in the hope of obtaining an introduction to the young ladies, but was obliged after all to go without it, for Lena had walked to the gate with two of her friends, and Gabriel was too much occupied in buttoning Sydney's ulster to do more than bow him a grave "good evening."

Lena returned in a few minutes, accompanied by Chips and a very tall, stout woman dressed in a voluminous linsey gown and a mammoth kapje of the same material. This lady, whose swarthy face would have been extremely plain if it had not been for its expression of great amiability and good sense, and for the pair of magnificent eyes, black as sloes, large, lustrous, and fringed with long ebon lashes, that lighted it, Lena introduced as Mrs. Hout. She shook hands cordially with Kathie, and then, turning to Mr. Bernhardt, she asked:

"Well, Mr. Bernhardt, what do you think of me, coming just as the meeting is over?"

"I think," he replied, with one of his rare, bright smiles, "that you must have been detained, Mrs. Hout; how did it happen?"

"Well, we left the farm in good time and would have been here long ago, only when we outspanned the mules got away, and Hans and the Kafir have been all the afternoon looking for them; we have just outspanned now. I hurried over, thinking I might be in time after all; but I got to the door just as the people were going out. I was going away again, but Lena wouldn't let me."

"Certainly not; I told Mrs. Hout that I should be very angry with her if she didn't come in and drink a cup of coffee with us. No, Miss Milner, I will not say good-night; I am not going to let you go either. No!" she added determinedly, as Kathie began to decline. "I really will not listen to 'No,' see how early it is, not yet nine o'clock."

"But we have so far to walk," demurred Kathie, "and papa will be uneasy if we stay late."

"It will not be late," persisted Lena, in her smiling, resolute way, "and you don't imagine, do you, that we are going to let you walk home alone? Of course not, Gabriel and I are going with you," and she coolly removed Kathie's hat, and pushed Pearl gently back into her seat. Then she went into the kitchen, from whence the odour of coffee soon diffused itself through the house, and the clatter of cups and

saucers made itself heard. Presently she came out with flushed cheeks and the faint odour of vaal-bush smoke hanging about her, and invited her guests into the dining-room. A very tiny little box it was to bear such a dignified name. It was scarcely ten feet square, and its furniture, a small oval table and four chairs, almost filled it. The table was daintily spread with a snow-white cloth, tiny blue cups, saucers, and plates, a plate of brown, home-made bread and butter, another of hot yellow cakes, or biscuits Lena called them, and pretty glass dishes of honey.

Chips assisted Mr. Bernhardt to carry chairs from the parlour.

"I see you have some honey still, Lena," said Mrs. Hout, as they seated themselves around the table. "I must bring some more the next time I come in. Hans has a nest almost ready to open. Our bees have done better this year than I ever knew them do. Wouldn't you like a swarm, Lena?"

"Thank you," replied Lena, gratefully, "but I am afraid I couldn't manage them. I am always so unlucky with bees, you know. But, Mrs. Hout, where is Hans? I had forgotten all about him."

"Where are you outspanned?" inquired Mr. Bernhardt, rising. "I will go and fetch him."

But Mr. Chips took that duty upon himself, and soon returned with Hans Hout, a young man of twenty-two or three, who inherited his mother's good nature and handsome eyes, but none of her liveliness. He sat down awkwardly in the seat Gabriel Bernhardt placed for him, looking very uncomfortable at finding strangers present. He was, however, the only one of the company who was silent or shy, and the impromptu meal was a very lively one. When it was nearly over, a scratching noise was heard at the canvas door, accompanied by a loud howl.

"It is our dog," Mrs. Hout explained to Kathie, as Gabriel opened the door. "He is never happy away from Hans and me."

As soon as the door was open, a huge black Newfoundland dog bounded into the room. He rushed up to Mrs. Hout and then to Hans, and from them he went to Lena and Gabriel; then, in canine fashion, greeted Chips, looked doubtfully at the strangers for a minute, but, finally deciding that they also were worthy of notice, or being too polite to leave them out in the cold, he walked gravely up to Kathie and laid his great black muzzle in her lap, and after

treating Pearl and Sydney to the same silent greeting he walked back to his master's chair and laid down beside it with his great, soft, brown eyes fixed on his face.

"What a magnificent creature!" exclaimed Kathie; "and how gentle he seems."

"He is not always so gentle," replied Hans, glancing at the dog, whose presence seemed to have given him courage to speak; "no one dares touch anything of mother's or mine when he's by, and he guards the farm better than twenty policemen could."

"It's a strange thing," remarked Chips, "that some people doesn't like dogs."

"I own to being prejudiced against little snarling curs myself," said Lena, "but a great, noble creature like that, I think few people would dislike."

"Well, I had a aunt once who hated dogs o' all kinds, from the biggest to the littlest. She never would keep a dog, an' if a strange dog come about the place, what do you s'pose she did, Miss Milner?"

"I cannot imagine," she replied, smiling, "beat it away perhaps."

"Tied a tin to its tail," suggested Mr. Hout.

"No; she always used to hang 'em."

"Hang them!" exclaimed Lena in a horrified tone; "you don't mean it."

"She did. If a strange dog come about the place, she made no more to do than jest get a rope with a noose at the end—she kep' one for the purpose—throw it over the critter's head, and hang it upon the nearest tree. She did, as true as I'm sittin' here."

"And did she never get bit?" inquired Hans.

"Not as ever I heard, but she got pretty near skeered out o' her wits once. My uncle had warned her and I'd warned her, and a score o' other folks had warned her, that she'd try to hang a dog once too often; but she took no notice to no one. Well, one day my uncle was away, and all the farm hands was down in the fields mowin', and my aunt 'Liza was standin' out in the garden, when up comes a dog smellin' about. He was a big feller, bigger than any she had ever hung afore; but she wasn't afraid to tackle him for all that. She jest goes into the house and gets her rope and tries to slip it over his head. Well, he dodged and made off to the stable and my aunt after him, she tried again to get the noose over his head, but she couldn't, and he

made off to the house. 'I'll get you now, you varmint,' she thinks, and off she went after him. He was in the kitchen, and in she went an' shut the door. Well, she was in a fix then, an' no mistake, for no sooner was the door shut than the critter sprung at her. She managed to jump on to the table, which, lucky for her, was a high one, and from there she climbed on to a cupboard, and the dog crouched down in front o' that cupboard growlin' and showin' his teeth o' the worst kind; and do you think he'd let her come down? not a bit of it; there she had to sit for three solid hours, till my uncle and the hands came home to supper and found her sittin' on the top o' that cupboard a'most dead with fright. Well, it learnt her a lesson that did; she never tried to hang another dog."

"I should think not," said Lena, while the others laughed. "I am sure she deserved the fright she got."

"She did so, and my uncle never let her forget it; he teased her about it till his dyin' day."

They lingered for some time longer around the table, then Kathie rose, saying that she must go, and Mrs. Hout declared that the Kafirs would be setting fire to the waggon or losing the mules again if she and Hans did not go back soon and look after them; so the little party broke up. They all walked with Mrs. Hout and her son as far as their waggon, and then climbed slowly up the steep, white road which led to the Milners' camp. Lena refused to go in, though a light in the room they used for parlour and dining-room proved that Mr. Milner was still up.

"It is too late," she said, "and remember, Miss Milner, that I do not look upon this as a return of my call; you have merely attended a prayer meeting at our house, which counts for nothing. I shall expect to see you very soon again."

Kathie promised that she would go, and after watching her new friends out of sight, she lifted the flap and went into the tent where her father sat. Her heart smote her for having left him alone when she saw him sitting with his head bent and his eyes fixed on something that was lying on the table before him, and which she knew before she saw it was a portrait of his absent son. Had he been sitting there ever since they had left him? Kathie reproached herself for having laughed and talked and really enjoyed the evening, and she resolved that she would not leave him alone with his sad thoughts again. The little excitement faded, the pleasure which the society of Lena Bernhardt

had given her died out, and very sober, very dark thoughts took their place. She lay for hours tossing about on her pillow, wondering where Gerald was and what he was doing; thinking, thinking, going over and over the old happy life at Beechwood, and her bright school days at St. Bede's, until the present with its strange, unaccustomed duties and surroundings, the river diggings and the new friends seemed like the dream, and the past, with its unshadowed brightness and its secure blessed uneventfulness, the reality.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNSHINE ON THE RIVER.

"WHY, Lena, are you working for a bazaar?" exclaimed Kathie one afternoon, when, upon entering Lena's room, she found her surrounded by a confusion of knitted woollen socks, jackets, caps, and scarves, little frocks, pinafores, sun bonnets, and numberless other pretty and daintily-made articles.

"No," answered Lena, laughing, "I am working for myself."

"For yourself? You will have to live a long while before you wear out all those shawls, scarves, and comforters."

Lena laughed at her face of mystification.

"I should indeed," she said. "I said I was working for myself. I did not say I was going to wear all these articles myself though."

"May I ask what you are going to do with them?"

"You may. I am going to send them to the Transvaal to sell. I have made hundreds of such articles and sold them there."

"But you do not take them there yourself, surely?"

"No; that would scarcely pay. Mr. Chips takes them for me when he goes up with his wagons; he is going again in a week or two."

"Does he sell them in the towns?"

"Sometimes, but generally to the farm people. I have always managed to sell as many as I could make, but if these new gold-fields about which there is so much talk

prove as rich as some people think they will, I am afraid my trade will be spoiled."

"Do you mean the De Kaap Gold-fields?"

"No. Do you know so little of what is going on in the world? Did you not know that gold has been discovered at Witwatersrandt?"

"No; and I do not know where Witwatersrandt is."

"You do not? What deplorable ignorance. Do you never read the newspapers?"

"Very seldom. Do you know, Lena, I am getting into a very bad way; events which do not immediately concern myself and the few people I care about have almost ceased to have any interest for me."

"That is a very dangerous state of mind," said Lena, smiling, but speaking seriously nevertheless. "Don't encourage it."

"I don't, at least not as a rule. But tell me about the gold-fields. Where are they, what are they, and why will they spoil your trade?"

"Witwatersrandt is a ridge or range of mountains in the Transvaal, south of Pretoria. Gold has been discovered there, both quartz and alluvial, I believe, and some people think that it exists there in larger quantities than even in Australia or California. A great many people are going there from the Colony, Natal, and the Free State."

"I wonder if it is true."

"I think it may be, for I remember a friend of ours who four or five years ago spent some time in that part of the country, telling us that he believed there were numerous rich gold reefs there, and as he was something of a geologist, and had spent a good many years in the Australian gold-fields, his opinion was worthy of respect."

"It will be a fine thing for the Transvaal if it is so."

"It will, indeed, a grand thing, and it would raise hundreds of the farmers of that part from the most squalid poverty to affluence. I shall be very glad if it is true."

"Even if it should spoil your trade?"

"Even then. See how generous I am! But, perhaps, if the gold-fields turn out well I shall be able to start out in a new line; who knows?"

"I cannot think," said Kathie, glancing at the littered table, "how you have found time to do so much work. I have very seldom seen you with needle or knitting-pins in your hands."

"And yet I assure you they are very often there. I have hours in the day when I am not attending to domestic affairs, studying, or practising, and those I devote to scarves, muslin kapjes, &c. And then I get up very early, seldom later than five o'clock, so I have a good deal of time. Our income is not large, so I am obliged to supplement it in some way, and this is as pleasant as any. Kathie, suppose we go down to the river. I can work just as well there and it is so hot here, altogether too warm even for me, and I suppose you are almost melting, poor little northerner that you are."

They found a shady place among the monkey bushes and grey rocks on the bank, and Kathie settled herself in it with a sigh of relief, but Lena asked:

"Wouldn't it be better under that willow on the other side. It is really cool and shady there."

"It looks pleasant; but are you going to propose that we shall swim across? We should be cool enough by the time we got there, no doubt."

"No, I am not thinking of attempting such a feat, especially as Jan—Gabriel's gravitator—told me that he *thought* he saw the great river snake gliding down the stream early this morning."

"*The* great river snake. I have never heard of it."

"It is reported to be an enormous snake—some people say a hundred feet long, others say twenty—of a bright green colour, and with eyes of fire. It generally makes its appearance here after a heavy rain. Tradition says that it has been known by imitating the crying of a child to decoy people to the riverside in the grey of the morning or the dusk of the evening, and then to draw them into the water, down to death. It further says that even if one escapes the death by drowning, he never lives long after having been 'called' by the river snake. A strange story, is it not?"

"Yes, and as every such story has a grain of truth for its foundation, I wonder how it originated."

"In the supersititious heart of some Griqua or Korana, I imagine. I have lived by the riverside for three years, and all the time, I assure you, I have kept a sharp look out for his slippery majesty; but I have never seen so much as a coil of his body or even the tip of his tail."

"It would be a pretty story to found a poem upon," said Kathie, looking with dreamy eyes over the yellow river

that looked in the hot November sunshine like a solid mass of amber.

"Yes, and doubtless some Griqua bard has already been inspired to tune his lyre in praise or blame of the 'Groot Water Slang,' and probably if you or I took the trouble to write a poem we should find that the subject was not original; so suppose instead of composing poetry we row across the river and rest under the willow. Look how long and green the grass is, and I can almost smell the fragrance of the little white flowers that grow there. No, don't look dubious about it, but come; it will do you good." Kathie obeyed, and very soon they were seated in the heavy, leaky boat, with their dresses well drawn up to prevent their being wetted by the muddy water which filled the bottom of the boat to a depth of several inches, and which, as it was not deep enough to sink the boat, Lena declared it would be waste of time to bail out, especially as there was nothing to bail it out with but an empty sardine tin. Soon they were skimming over the glassy surface of the river. Lena rowed well, and Kathie had long ago learned to use the oars, Gerald had taught her; and her thoughts went irresistibly back to the happy hours they had spent in their little cockle-shell boat on the willow-fringed lakelet that separated Colonel Osborne's grounds from Beechwood. Ah! those happy, happy hours; sunny, careless hours; what a gulf separated them from the present! A very few minutes sufficed to bring them to the other side. Lena sprang out, and after making the boat fast to a rock, they hurried quickly through the sunshine and sank luxuriously down on the thick, soft carpet of grass under the willow—solitary scion of his once numerous race that the diggers' ruthless axe had spared.

Three months had passed since Lena and Kathie's acquaintance began, and the friendship had deepened and strengthened with each succeeding week. Lena found a charm in Kathie's society which she had never found in that of any other friend, and there was a brightness, hopefulness, and sincerity about Lena Bernhardt which were wonderfully refreshing to Kathie. When tantalising visions of the past and dark fears for the future would rise up before her mind, and when harassed by a hundred petty cares and worries which were all the harder to bear because so new and unexpected, when depressed, disheartened, and tired in mind and body, she could, by seeking Lena's society,

generally contrive to drive away dark thoughts; even a look at her bright, strong face was sufficient to dispel the chilly vapours which would sometimes gather about her heart and mind in spite of brave efforts to keep them at a distance. From Lena, too, she had learned, or rather she was slowly learning, that greatest of all lessons, namely, to put her trust in Him who has promised to be a shield and refuge to those that fear Him.

Things had not gone very well or prosperously with the Milners since pitching their tents on the diamond diggings. Mr. Milner's health was far from good; the hope he had entertained of finding his son was as far as ever from being realised, and of the diamonds he had been led to believe were so plentiful he had found only a very few, and those of trifling value. In fact, the total value of the diamonds he had found was not sufficient to pay the natives who worked in his claims. It was a daily pain to him to see Kathie and Pearl with sunburnt complexions and roughened hands performing all sorts of menial tasks to which they had never been accustomed, and which could not be safely left to Janjie, their Zulu cook. The actual pinch of poverty they had not felt as yet, for as soon as the stock of ready money was exhausted Mr. Milner had sent to his agent at Capetown for more. But the supply there was not inexhaustible, he knew; the stream which was constantly flowing out was not counter-balanced by an inflowing current, and must, therefore, some time become exhausted. It was not a large stream, so that the time was not far off, and when the money was done—what then? Mr. Milner asked himself the question sometimes, and the voice of prudence answered "Leave Hebron at once, it is useless to remain." But the voice of prudence was one to which he had never lent a very willing ear, and though it spoke loudly at times he always contrived to stifle it, and listened instead to that which bade him hope that Gerald would yet join him there.

Mr. Milner was proud too, and the thought of returning to Cape Town, which he had left against the advice of all who knew him, was extremely distasteful to him; and besides this, the search for diamonds had a sort of fascination for him—it was a species of gambling, and it interested him. One never knew what was buried in the few yards of rocky earth enclosed between his pegs; any sieveful, any shovelful of red, sand-encrusted gravel *might* contain a brilliant of the first water. Any one of those grey rocks

might cover a gem beside which the limpid-beauty of the Koh-i-noor itself would be as nothing. So, yielding to the fascination of all these "mights" to the other feelings at which we have hinted, and, above all, to the influence of that hope of finding Gerald, which, though it was growing fainter, was by no means yet dead in his heart, Mr. Milner lingered on at the diggings, when, if he had done wisely, he would have returned at once to Cape Town. Kathie had more than once tried to persuade him to do so, but in vain.

"No," he had answered impatiently upon one occasion, "I gave up my house and my office at Cape Town, and I do not intend to return there poorer than I came away, and look about me for employment like a clerk out of a situation."

"But, papa," Kathie had said, "you need not look for employment. Mr. Hildyard could no doubt obtain another appointment under Government for you, and one which would, perhaps, suit you better than the other."

"No; Hildyard obtained one appointment for me, and I threw it up, and it is not likely that he would care to use his influence or put himself to the trouble of finding me another; and even if he would I should not ask him. I have not yet learned to like asking favours at rich men's hands," he added bitterly, "and, Kathie, Gerald may join us here yet."

Lena and Kathie made themselves comfortable on the grass, with their backs against the gnarled, twisted trunk of the old tree, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the cool, green shadow and the faint breeze.

The yellow river gleamed and sparkled, taking on every moment some new beauty, some added brilliant colour, as the westering sun gathered great masses of gold, purple, and dull red cloud about his path. The leaves of the bushes and the long rushes which grew at the river's edge glittered like glass, the little fragrant white flowers trembled on their fragile stems, and the rose-pink blossoms of the river grass drooped their heads in the still heat. Huge yellow fish swam about, chased each other, and leaped out of the water, plunging back again with loud splashes, agitating the water with great rippling circles. On a rocky cape, a few yards above the tree, two cranes were standing, still and motionless, as inanimate apparently as if they had been a part of the grey rock on which they stood. The aspect of the whole landscape, from the unearthly, beautiful sky, to the liquid,

golden river, the motionless dreaming birds, the faint, heavy odour of the flowers, and the warm, veil-like haze which hung over every distant object, was not calculated to encourage industry. On the contrary, the very atmosphere seemed to conduce to a languid, dream-like apathy, to which the two girls yielded themselves without an effort. Lena's work dropped on her lap, and she fell into a profound reverie, while Kathie's thoughts wandered—wandered, who shall say, how far and whither? After a long time, during which the sun had travelled far down the western sky, and the high banks on the opposite side were beginning to throw dark shadows upon the water, Lena brought her dazzled eyes from the burnished river, and called her thoughts back from dreamland to the world of realities. She turned to her companion, and was about to utter an apology for her long silence, but she saw by the wrapt expression of her face and the unseeing gaze of the tear-filled hazel eyes that it was unnecessary.

Kathie had never noticed her silence, had forgotten her presence—her very existence even—for the time, and she knew that her thoughts had travelled even farther than her own—through the realms of imagination and memory—and were now wandering along the aisles of the past, heavy with the breath of joy's withered flowers, and filled with the ashes of dead and buried hopes.

The history of that past Lena did not know, but she guessed that it was not a safe or healthy region for her friend's thoughts to remain in for long, so she began in a low tone, so as not to recall her too rudely to existing actualities, to repeat some stanzas of the "Lotus Eaters." That broke the spell; Kathie drew a long breath, gave herself a little shake, and looking up at Lena exclaimed, with a gravity that was a little forced, "Why, Lena, where have we been for the last half-hour? I wonder if your thoughts have been as far from the Vaal river as mine."

"I don't know," replied Lena, "they travelled a considerable distance; so far, in fact, that I had forgotten all the beauty which caused me to drift into dreamland. Is not the river lovely? Just look over there at that smooth sweep of dark blue, paling off into silvery grey; and above the point it is all crimson and molten gold, while down by the island it is all pale green; look, where those wild ducks are swimming."

"Yes, it is lovely; and yet its beauty is all borrowed;

it is not its own. When the sun is gone, where will be all the brightness and colour and beauty? All gone; it will be nothing but a cold, dark, turbid stream." The words were spoken sadly, with a shade of bitter meaning beneath them; but Lena's face lit up brightly.

"Do you know," she said eagerly, "I like that thought; that all the brightness and colour, all, in fact, which makes the river worth looking at, is borrowed from the sun—that is I like the analogy I can read in it."

"What analogy can you read in it?"

"It seems to me that the river is like a human life; it is going on without pausing for one moment, without the possibility of turning to retrace one step; straight on it must go in the way marked out for it, straight on to the ocean —the ocean of eternity. And as long as the sun shines upon it—the sunshine of hope and faith in God—it is beautiful and bright. No matter how cold and jagged are the rocks which lie beneath it, no matter how dreary, barren, or unlovely the banks between which it flows, it is beautiful with light and life and colour; but take away the sun, let it be obscured by clouds—the clouds doubt, unbelief, and discontent—and the beauty is gone; it is nothing but a chill, turbid stream, fretting along hopelessly between its imprisoning banks."

Kathie's face seemed to have caught the reflection of the sun's brightness while her friend was speaking. "Thank you," she said earnestly, when Lena paused, "you have given me a strong, good thought in the place of a weak repining. I shall always for the future think of what you have said when I look at the river."

"Kathie, you will not be offended with me if I ask you something, will you?"

"Of course not. How can you ask?"

"Well! Don't you think that you look a little too much on the dark side of everything?"

"Perhaps I do; but, Lena, what if there is no bright side to look at?"

"I do not think that is possible; at least I know that my darkest days have had a bright side; though, to be sure, I never could see it, till I sought it diligently and prayerfully," she added softly.

"Lena, you do not know——" Kathie began, then stopped abruptly.

"I do not know what trouble is, do you mean? Yes, I do, trouble of many kinds—death, disappointment, sickness,

poverty—I have known little else for the last seven years. But I have never failed, when I looked earnestly, to catch sight of the clouds' silver lining, and," she added affectionately, "I want you to see it too."

"Thank you. I am ashamed to say there is no bright side since I have you for a friend, and I have dear papa still, though I am often afraid I shall not keep him long"—and the slow tears gathered again—"and I have Pearl and the boys. But once I had no clouds in my sky, nor dreamed of any. I seemed to have everything to hope for and nothing to fear. My life was like a summer day—fair, serene, cloudless—when suddenly, without one word of warning, all was changed. At one blow I lost all. Suddenly the blow fell, and we were plunged into a sea of bitter sorrow and shame; and at the first breath of it, at the first whisper, our friends—people whom we had known all our lives, and of whose friendship we had no doubt—forsook us and turned against us. A lawsuit in which my father had been engaged terminated unfavourably, and we were obliged to leave our home and come into exile. All that, however, we might outlive and forget—sorrow, exile, the loss of friends, the shame even; but, Lena, there is another trouble which is always present with us, a cloud which will never grow less dark, a wound which time can never heal, a haunting fear, a constant dread. I may not tell you what it is, Lena, but it is that which has made an old man of my father and darkened all our lives."

Lena's eyes were full of tears when Kathie finished speaking—tears of deep sympathy.

"I guessed long ago that you had some great trouble," she said, "and I longed to tell you how I felt for you, and how glad I should be to help you if I could. But, Kathie, although you may not tell me what the trouble is, and very likely I could not help you if you did, God knows it without being told, and He can help you to bear it; if He will He can remove it altogether. For His own wise purposes He has sent it, and He knows all about it."

"Yes, He knows, and you have taught me to believe that He cares, and that belief has made my sky seem less dark; but, Lena, I have not your faith, and I often ask—nay, I am always asking—why this sorrow was sent to us. It seems to me that I could cheerfully have borne any other. If it had only been poverty, or the desertion of friends."

"It is always so, I imagine," said Lena as she paused;

the particular trouble or loss which God sees fit to send us is of all others the hardest to bear. Here we can only see a little way before us—a step at a time—we can feel the need of faith and patience, but we cannot know the need for the trouble nor understand His reason for sending it; but we shall know up there."

Lena paused suddenly, catching sight of a tall, stout figure which was coming down the steep grassy bank towards them.

"How do you do?" called the owner of the figure in a loud, deep voice. "I thought it must be you," she added, as she sank down on the grass beside Lena and began pantingly to fan herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Why, Mrs. Bain, where have you come from?" exclaimed Lena; "you look exhausted."

"I should think I did. I've been to the Witberg diggings. Just think what a walk I've had. I went up there to see a poor woman who I heard was sick. She's a perfect stranger to me, but I thought it was my duty to go and see her, and small thanks I got for my pains. The pride and ingratitude of some people is abominable. To think of being treated rudely after my long tramp—four miles if it's a foot, I vow."

Lena expressed her regret that Mrs. Bain had been rudely treated, and inquired the name of the ungrateful sick woman.

"It's Mrs. Saunders." replied Mrs. Brian. "I dare say you've heard of those Saunderses. They've not been here very long, and a stuck-up set they are too, though they're as poor as poor can be. I've no patience with people like that, for there's no two things that go worse together than want of money and uppishness; and yet it's surprising," she continued, with a glance at Kathie, "how many people one meets nowadays who seem to think that by showing a great amount of the one they'll make people forget what a precious little they've got of the other."

"What is the matter with Mrs. Saunders?" asked Lena. "It is nothing serious, I hope."

"Half of it is imagination, and the other half is want of proper food. I don't suppose they have anything to eat but mealy meal pap from one week's end to another. It's nothing but that that's made her sick. I told her husband so, and he looked—I can't tell you how he looked—but he as good as told me to mind my own business; such ingratitude I never saw equalled. And when I was coming away I pressed a sovereign into Mrs. Saunders's hand, telling her I could well

spare it, as of course I can, and that she mustn't spend it on anything for Saunders or the children, but just buy some little delicacy she fancied for herself, and—if you'll believe it—she very nearly threw it in my face, asked me if I meant to insult her, and as good as ordered me out of her tent. I don't think I was ever treated so shamefully in all my life before."

Kathie's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were full of tears, which were certainly not brought there by pity for Mrs. Bain, and Lena answered gravely:

"I do not wonder that she felt pained. You made a slight mistake, Mrs. Bain, when you offered money to Mrs. Saunders; she is a lady, and accustomed to a style of life very different from her present one."

"I don't care what she's been accustomed to," rejoined the lady, tossing her head; "she's only one remove from a beggar *now*, and that's what she ought to look at. She had no right to refuse a little money, which I could well spare, and which was kindly offered I'm sure."

"I am sure it was," said Lena gently; "but independence and delicacy of feeling are things which cling to people—some people—always, in spite of poverty; and it is possible that your offer of money, kindly meant as it was, gave a keener pang to poor Mrs. Saunders than any hardship or privation she has had to bear."

"I don't see it; people like that have no business to be so over-sensitive. They ought to be willing to accept help from those who are in a position to offer it."

"I cannot see *that*," put in Kathie, with indignantly flashing eyes. "It would be hard indeed if people were forced to accept, merely because they were poor, charity which any one chose to thrust upon them."

"I never thrust my charity upon any one, Miss Milner," said Mrs. Bain grandly. "I merely offered Mrs. Saunders out of my abundance a small sum which I should never have missed, and which would have been extremely useful to her; but she is one of those people, unfortunately too common, whose pride increases as their other possessions grow less," and, with a look which seemed to say that after that Kathie must feel herself crushed, Mrs. Bain turned to Lena and inquired if her brother was enjoying good health. Lena replied in the affirmative, and the lady continued: "I thought perhaps he wasn't well as he hasn't been to see me lately."

"He has been busy," Lena explained.

"Yes, I dare say he has; I mustn't forget that it isn't every one who has so much leisure as I have. My time is my own. I'm never tied; it would be strange if I was, keeping three servants as I do. Of course it's different with you who have no one to help you. What with cooking, tidying, and setting tables, I don't suppose you have an hour in the day that you can call your own. You should really get a servant, my dear."

Lena smiled calmly.

"It is by no means so bad as that," she said. "I have many hours of leisure during the day, and as to a servant, I have no room in my small kitchen for one, even if I could afford it. Pray do not waste any pity on me, Mrs. Bain."

"Well, I believe in servants myself. Have you still got that Zulu boy of yours, Miss Milner?"

"We have not lost him yet."

"I dare say you won't keep him much longer, then," said she comfortingly. "They always get lazy and cheeky after a while, those Zulus, and such thieves as they are. Have you caught him stealing yet?"

"Never; I believe he is very honest."

"Do you? rest happy in your belief then; but I give you my word there never was an honest nigger yet—never."

"Oh, Mrs. Bain!" exclaimed Lena, laughing. "Isn't that rather a sweeping assertion?"

"Sweeping or not it's true; they're all born liars and thieves, and they always will be as long as they are niggers, though some of them are sly enough to pretend to be honest; but they never deceive me. No, I never have a good word for a nigger."

"Nor for any one else," Kathie was almost tempted to say.

"What are you working at?" asked Mrs. Bain presently, catching sight of the piece of work which Lena had folded up and put into her basket.

"It is a muslin pinafore, Mrs. Bain," replied she.

"Humph, looks rather pretty. Let's see—who is it for?"

"That I cannot say."

"Oh! going to send it up country to sell?"

"That is my intention."

"And what else have you made up?"

"A good many articles. I should tire you if I began to enumerate them all; this is not the only pinafore."

"Well, I hope you'll manage to get sale for them all and get a good price; I suppose you need the money, my dear."

"It is fair to suppose so, since I go to so much trouble to obtain it. I am very fond of money, Mrs. Bain."

"Are you? Well now, I should never have guessed it. I thought you were one of those people who profess to care only for good things."

"Surely, Mrs. Bain, you do not deny that money is a good thing," said Kathie mischievously.

"No, indeed, I don't. I think that money is a good thing; one of the best things in the world; and it's my opinion that the people who haven't it ought always to be willing to play second fiddle to those who have. What are you smiling at?" she added, as Kathie and Lena found it impossible to conceal their amusement at this plain putting into words of what every one knew to be the opinion of Mrs. Bain, who never failed to remind her acquaintances that she possessed five thousand pounds in the bank, a farm near Hebron, two more in the Transvaal, and a share in a flourishing business in Kimberley. "I don't see anything to laugh at," she added vexedly, as a suspicion crossed her mind that Lena Bernhardt and 'that stuck-up English chit' were making fun of her.

"Nor, to tell the truth, do I," said Lena, growing suddenly grave. "Kathie, do you perceive that our friend on the other side of the river is giving us very broad hints that it is time to go home."

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Bain quickly. "What friend are you speaking of?"

"The sun, Mrs. Bain; no one worse than the sun. May we have the honour of rowing you across?"

"Well, I don't mind; but did you come alone—without a gentleman to row you?"

"We did. We are quite independent of gentlemen, I assure you."

"And so you were brave enough to row yourselves across," continued Mrs. Bain, as she seated herself as comfortably as possible in the leaky old boat. "Isn't it rather a masculine thing to do? I don't say there's any harm in it myself, but some people would call it hoydenish, and find fault with it."

"I don't doubt it in the least," returned Lena. "There are people who seem to take a delight in finding fault with everything and every one. But fortunately Miss Milner and I care very little for their opinion."

They landed Mrs. Bain a few hundred yards above the pont and then rowed back to their own landing place, where Gabriel Bernhardt was standing ready to assist them to land. The sun was setting, so Kathie refused Lena's invitation to "Come in and have some music," and hurried home.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMBIE'S VISIT.

THE sun had just set when Kathie reached home. Home! She smiled to herself as she wondered what she would have thought a year ago of such a home. It was more a subject for tears than smiles, however. That her home! She stood still to take in the picture. Four tents, a tiny iron kitchen, a large heap of chopped-up vaal-bush, two water casks, a large gravitating tub, and a disabled "baby" in the broken sieve of which Towser Chips' baboon was turning somersaults. That was her home, the only home she was likely to know for some time; and unbidden the question rose in her mind, "What would Graham Keith say if he could see it?" Very peaceful the little camp looked, and very neat and orderly as well. There was no wind to agitate the canvas and blow the dust about. The tents stood still and motionless, and tinged with red from the glow in the western sky. A thin column of smoke ascended from the chimney; the narrow passages between the tents were freshly sprinkled and swept, and Kathie owned that it might be worse. A little way off Sydney's clear voice could be heard singing with a sweetness and earnestness that brought the tears to her eyes, "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home."

"After all," she thought, "it matters very little where or how one lives, if only every day is spent in His service."

Clive was busy building a suspension bridge of reeds and pack thread over a chasm about two feet deep, which yawned between two ant-heaps. The boy was a born engineer. All his time was spent in building bridges, sinking shafts, making tunnels through ant-heaps, and manufacturing machines of all kinds. Pearl had set the tea-table and was sitting at the head of it, reading that most interesting book, "How I found Livingstone." Before her was spread out the map of Africa, which she consulted every now and then,

tracing the road, and following with deep and absorbing interest every step of the way traversed by the Expedition and its gallant leader. So absorbed was she that she did not hear Kathie's entrance, nor look up until she asked:

"Well, Pearl, has your hero reached Ujiji yet?"

Pearl looked up from her book and drew a long breath, as if suddenly brought back from a great distance.

"No, not yet, but he is nearly there. Oh, Kathie, isn't he splendid; so brave, so clever, so everything. I wish I were a man. I'd write and ask him to let me go with him the next time he goes."

"I don't believe he'd take you. Has papa come in yet?"

"No, not yet; and, oh, Kathie, what do you think? Somebody's dog came here this afternoon and carried off all the bread."

"Did you send Janjii for more?"

"No, there was no money, papa has the purse. It doesn't matter, we shall have tea a little later, that's all."

"It does matter, though. We cannot afford to lose the bread three times a week as we have been doing lately, and it is very annoying to have other people's dogs making so free with our pantry."

Just then the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs were heard. Sydney's singing ceased suddenly, and Clive called out in joyful accents, "Kathie, Pearl! Here is Ambie—Ambie Hildyard—hurrah!"

Pearl shut up her book quickly, and folded up the map over which she had been poring—the hero she admired so much forgotten in the pleasure of seeing her old friend. But across Kathie's face a shadow fell. Not that her friend was unwelcome, but Ambie had wanted something more than friendship, and more she could not give him. Ambie had met Mr. Milner on his way from the river, and they had driven up together. There was no doubt of his sincere pleasure at the sight of the young man. Kathie had not seen his face look so bright for many months. Well, if her father were glad to see him, so would she be. Any one who could dispel even for a little while the clouds which generally enveloped him was welcome, and perhaps Ambie had forgotten the foolish fancy of nine months ago. Most sincerely she hoped so, and his very quiet, unembarrassed, and friendly greeting went far to convince her that such was the case.

Ambie had brought with him a parcel of new books, a

large hamper of fruit, and to Kathie he handed a small pasteboard box, which on being opened proved to contain an exquisite bouquet of flowers, at the sight of which Kathie uttered an irrepressible exclamation of admiration. She lifted it with tender hands from its soft, green bed of moss, and touched with loving fingers the rich red and creamy white rosebuds nestling among their glossy leaves, the velvety-white gardenias, starry, fragrant jessamine, great, glowing carnations, and pale, sweet heliotrope, all enclosed in a ring of fragile fronds of maidenhair fern.

"Oh, how good of you!" she exclaimed gratefully. "I have not seen anything so lovely since I left Cape Town."

Ambie smiled, well pleased that his gift was appreciated.

"I am glad you like them," he said; "they grew in my sister's conservatory; she is almost as ardent a lover of flowers as yourself."

"And does she permit you to cut her treasures with such an unsparing hand?"

Ambie laughed.

"She permits me to do pretty much as I like; but I did not ask her permission this time," he replied.

"You are staying with Mrs. De Beer now, are you not?" Mr. Milner inquired.

"Yes, since her return from England I have been. Hotels and boarding-houses are hateful places to me; no matter how luxuriously I am lodged, I never feel at home in them, and Florrie and Gilbert like to have me, or are good enough to say they do; so I have taken up my abode with them."

"Do you like conducting your Kimberley business better than being in Cape Town?"

"Oh, no, sir; not nearly as much. That is I like the business much better, but I was born within sound of the sea; and, somehow, I never feel happy away from it."

Kind messages also Ambie had brought from all their Cape Town friends, and from his father and aunt a pressing invitation for them to spend Christmas at Ingleside. "You will come, of course," he said, looking from Mr. Milner to Kathie. "You will not refuse my father's invitation."

Kathie smiled and shook her head, and Mr. Milner replied decidedly, "It is very kind of your father; but we could not possibly go."

Ambie looked as he felt—bitterly disappointed. "Oh, do not say that, sir," he said. "My father will not take a refusal, and Aunt Hester bade me say that she will only

forgive you for running away during her absence on condition that you all come and spend Christmas with her."

"It would be impossible," repeated Mr. Milner. "Perhaps we shall be able to spend the Christmas after next with you."

"I hope you will have left Hebron long before that, sir," said Ambie earnestly.

Mr. Milner shrugged his shoulders and made no reply, and the conversation drifted away from Hebron to pleasanter subjects. Ambie had much to tell of Kimberley, his recent flying visit home, the tour through Europe from which his father, aunt, and sister had just returned, and he exerted himself so successfully to interest Mr. Milner, and to bring to Kathie's lips the smile which it pained him so sadly to see was such a stranger there, that they could not but respond to his frank gaiety and easy flow of interesting talk, and be as gay and bright as he wished them to be. The result was that the evening of his visit was the liveliest and most pleasant one they had spent since pitching tent in Hebron.

The next morning he went with Mr. Milner to his claim, and was initiated into the mysteries of "puddling," "washing," and "gravitating;" and in the evening he announced that he had hired a boat, and intended to take them all for a row.

"And we will forget that we are in Hebron," he said, "and try and imagine that we are in Cape Town sailing over the bay."

Mr. Milner excused himself from being of the party, and, after trying in vain to persuade him to change his mind, they reluctantly departed down the white road without him. They rowed down to the low bush-covered island below the pont, where they landed, and, after wandering about for some time among the tall reeds and bushes, over the crystals and round white pebbles with which the grass was strewn, they returned, rowing slowly and enjoyingly over the liquid silver of the water, drinking in the restful calm beauty of the scene, so different in its still, pale, peaceful aspect from the gorgeous, brilliant, sunset beauty of the afternoon before.

It was late when they once more began the ascent of the steep hill.

"Kathie," began Ambie, walking slowly to allow Pearl and the children to get a long way in front, "do you think it is quite impossible to persuade Mr. Milner to come down to Ingleside and spend Christmas with us?"

"I am sure of it; we could not possibly go, Ambie."

"I have been counting so much upon your coming," he said, half reproachfully. "My father quite expects you, and Aunt Hester, I am sure, will hardly care to see me if I go home without all of you. She was so surprised and grieved when she heard that you had left Mosswood —'taken the opportunity,' as she called it, 'of running away when she was absent.' You will come, won't you?"

"Indeed we cannot. I should like it very much, *very* much; but it is impossible."

"Where and how are you going to spend Christmas? On the top of this burning, stony hill?"

"Oh, no. We have promised to join Miss Bernhardt and her brother in a picnic up the river."

"A picnic up the river," repeated Ambie with intense scorn. "And you prefer that to a fortnight in Cape Town, and seeing my father and Aunt Hester again. Oh, Kathie!"

"Indeed, I do not prefer it; nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see dear Mrs. Wylde and Mr. Hildyard again. And I should love to see Cape Town once more, and the sea," she added, a little accent of longing finding its way into her voice. "I would give a great deal to stand on the beach again and watch the great blue waves dashing in and rolling up to my feet. There are times when I positively pine for a free, fresh breath from the sea; but we cannot go. Some other time, if your father is good enough to ask us again, we may be able to go."

Ambie did not reply; he looked a good deal disappointed and a little vexed as well, and the rest of the hill was climbed in silence. When they reached the top he asked abruptly, "Who are these Bernhardts whom you have all learned to like so much?"

"They are Lena and Gabriel Bernhardt; they came here from Cape Town three years ago. Gabriel was somebody's secretary, and Lena taught music and German in a large school," replied Kathie succinctly.

"And what are they now—diggers?"

"Yes; we are very fortunate, Pearl and I, to have such a friend as Lena; she is so good, so nice. I don't know what we should do without her."

"And her brother," he asked, with a vexed jealousy he could not hide. "Is he good and nice too?"

"Very," replied Kathie coolly. "And so clever, I am sure you would like him, Ambie."

"I am sure I should not. I am jealous—I must confess it —most horribly jealous of these new friends whom you have learned in three months to like so much better than us."

"It is very unkind of you to say that," returned Kathie warmly. "I am not so ungrateful for all the kindness you and your father and Mrs. Wylde showed us for so long, and you know it, Ambie."

"I know it," he answered, with quick self-reproach. "And I know that I am horribly rude and ill-tempered; pray forgive me. But it pains me so to see you all living here, and in such a way; I cannot tell you how it pains me. Will nothing induce your father to leave the place? The climate, the work, and the rough life are quite unsuited to him and to all of you."

"I know it," she said, with a little sigh, and the weary look settling down over her face again. "I am sadly afraid papa will fall ill; but he will not hear of returning to Cape Town, nor of leaving Hebron at all at present.

"I cannot imagine what induces him to remain; I think this is one of the most dreary, forlorn places on earth. Surely he has no hope of finding your brother here."

"Yes, he has. His hopes are growing fainter; but he still thinks that Gerald may join us here. Oh, how I wish we knew where he is!"

"I wish with all my heart you did. Kathie, do you know I have been trying all the time for the past two years to find him? I have looked in every place, likely and unlikely, and I have made inquiries—cautious, safe ones, you know—but without the least success. I begin to think that he did not come to this country after all."

"Perhaps not. It was very good of you, Ambie; I did not know you had been taking so much trouble for us."

"To serve you was no trouble. I only wish my efforts to find him had been successful. I wish most earnestly that I could persuade Mr. Milner to leave this place. He will only grow more melancholy and disheartened the longer he stays here. He looks years older than when I saw him last, and you—do you know how you look?"

"Oh, I am very well," she answered hastily, very unwilling to become the subject of conversation. "Any change you see in me is to be attributed solely to a sunburnt complexion and a shabby frock."

"No, it is not that," he said decidedly. "You look

delicate, fragile, and you have a worn, tired look that you used not to wear in Cape Town. Oh, Kathie, let me take you away from here, from this wretched uncongenial life. Let me try and make you happy. You do not care for me, I know, but, perhaps you will learn to like me a little some day, and I will be very patient. Only give me the right to take you away from here and take care of you."

Kathie stood still, utterly dismayed and confounded at this sudden, unexpected outburst, all danger of which she had fancied was past.

"Oh, Ambie!" she exclaimed, when surprise and dismay permitted her to speak. "Please do not talk so, please. I thought, I hoped, that you had forgotten all that—that nonsense."

"I have not forgotten, and I never shall forget. Kathie, give me such affection as you can and I shall be content to wait for more; and if you can never give me more I shall never reproach you and never be impatient. You are so wearied and worried and burdened with cares and anxieties of all kinds. No, do not deny it. I know it is true. Let me take you away from this wretched life. Be my wife, Kathie, and it shall be the business of my life to make you happy."

"Oh, Ambie, hush, please hush," she pleaded, almost tearfully. "I am so very sorry——"

"No, don't be sorry," he interrupted. "Kathie, think of the life that lies before you here; do not deceive yourself; your father will find no fortune, and your brother will not join you here. Think how I could help Mr. Milner if I were his son. Think how much I could do for the boys. I am not asking you to leave them, only to let me make your path smoother than it is now, to lift off your shoulders the burden of care which is weighing you down. I will give up my business in Kimberley, I will live anywhere you wish—anywhere your father wishes. You need not be parted for one day from those you love."

"You are very good, Ambie, very generous; but what I told you in Cape Town is equally true now."

"I know; but, Kathie, do you not understand? I am not asking for your love. I will be content to wait for it—to do without it altogether if it must be so. I am only asking for the right to make you happy; is that so much to ask?"

"Perhaps not, but it is more than I can give you. I like

you too well to listen to you, and some day you will be glad that I was wiser than you."

"I shall not. I must be hateful indeed if you prefer a dreary life of loneliness and poverty on the diamond diggings to my society," he said bitterly.

"You are unkind, and you know better. I shall always think of you as one of my best friends. I care almost as much for you as for my own dear brother Gerald. Now, Ambie, please do not let us talk any more of this."

"Kathie, will nothing I can say induce you to change your mind?"

"No, nothing."

"At some future time, perhaps, you will think differently. I will be patient; I will wait seven years for you as Jacob waited for Rachel, if you will only give me a little hope that at the end of that time you may change your mind."

"It would not be right to tell you to hope, Ambie, for I know my mind now as well as I should seven years hence. Please let us forget all this and be friends, as we used to be long ago before this foolish fancy came into your mind."

He took and lightly held for a moment the hand she extended to him, but made no reply. He knew now that she meant what she said, that nothing he could say would change her, and the sad, pained, disappointed look that chased the boyish brightness from his face made him look strangely old and changed. Kathie reproached herself for having brought it there; but she had done right, and he would get over the pain of her refusal. He was not the man to grow morose and melancholy because a cherished wish had been disappointed. He was so constituted that as long as he was well and strong and the sun shone above him, as long as he was in a world teeming with beauties and interests, it was impossible for him to be sad or unhappy for long. He would soon forget his disappointment and be glad that she had been so much wiser than he had and refused to give him a hand with which her heart could not go. At any rate she comforted herself with the hope that it would be so.

Very early the next morning he returned to Kimberley, and the little breeze and stir his visit had caused died away, leaving in the minds of the others a pleasant memory and in Kathie's heart some added sadness, and they settled down once more to the dull, monotonous life from which it had roused them for a little while.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS DAY.

VERY early on Christmas morning, long before the sun had risen, before even his rosy heralds had brightened the eastern sky with the news of his coming, the long tent-wagon containing the Milners and Lena and Gabriel Bernhardt rumbled up the long street of Hebron, rattled over the stones, and jolted heavily on its way to the place chosen by Gabriel the day before as the most suitable one for the picnic. It was very early; night had still almost undisputed possession of earth and sky. A few stars still shone in the blue, but these were beginning to pale, though almost imperceptibly. The world was still sleeping; nothing was astir but the busy little mearcats that sat in rows along the side of the road, and stared with their bright, wise, little eyes at the passing wagon, wondering, perhaps, what was this huge, unwieldy thing that rolled and rumbled on so heavily and so alarmingly near their subterranean dwellings, and disturbed so rudely the peace of the Christmas morning.

They had chosen to start thus early to avoid the heat, and to make as long as possible this holiday spent far away from sight and sound of diamond digging and red, glaring stones. The spot they had chosen was five or six miles up the river, and they reached it just as the sun showed the top of his golden rim above the hills, waking into life every tree, leaf, blade of grass, and insect, and brightening with a thousand points of flame the surface of the river, which here was broad and studded with tiny islets, on every one of which grew a clump of willows with gnarled, twisted, and knotted trunks, and whose long, drooping branches covered with birds' nests hung over into the little cascades which foamed and leaped between the islands. The hills close to the river were covered with thick, jungly bush, and all along the river bank was a forest of willows. The river banks were in some parts smooth and sandy, and covered with round white pebbles and crystals, in others it was rocky, and higher up the stream the thick and vividly green grass enamelled with delicate shell-pink lilies grew down to the water's edge. On both sides of the river were lines and ridges of kopjes covered with fantastic piles of red and grey rocks, clumps of vaal-bush, and low, stunted mimosas, whose fluffy, yellow blossoms filled the air with perfume.

After breakfast, which they took seated on a great flat rock at the river's edge, they proceeded to explore the semi-wild hills and deep gully-like ravines in the neighbourhood, with a delightful feeling of bird-like freedom, and a deep intense enjoyment of the cool, green freshness and beauty, which could only be thoroughly appreciated by eyes that for long weeks had ached at the sight of glittering fragments of broken stones and glaring heaps of sand and gravel. The hush and quiet too, broken only by the jubilant song of hundreds of birds and the gurgling sound of the miniature cataracts, was very grateful to ears which had been constantly harassed and irritated by the incessant flapping of tents.

That was a happy morning. Yes, happy despite the fact that in the sky of each there were clouds, on that of some very dark and deepening ones, for every one seemed determined to enjoy to the utmost this day spent among the trees, birds, and flowers. Even Mr. Milner exerted himself to appear cheerful, and talked and smiled, and even jested and romped with his boys, and made fishing lines and rods for them. Lena was astonished to find how extremely pleasant a person Kathie's grave, melancholy father could be when once the clouds which generally enveloped him were fairly driven away. He and the boys crossed over on some stepping stones to one of the grassy islands to fish, and the others started for a long walk along the bank of the river. Gabriel carried a gun, but though the bush was alive with birds, he could not find it in his heart to kill, merely for the sake of sport, one of the gentle, blue doves that cooed so softly among the branches, or any of the bright plumaged birds whose gay music added so much to the day's pleasure. A long walk they took, now climbing up a rocky kopje, now down a sandy gully full of curious stones, now plunging through thick patches of bush matted together by creepers and trailing plants which shaded the sunlight, and where the hot air was faint and heavy with the scent of the greenish-white blossoms of a plant which crept over the ground and twined around every tree trunk slender enough to admit of being clasped in its thorny embrace, then emerging again into the open day at the water's edge. At length, hot, breathless, and tired, they seated themselves at the foot of a willow tree to rest before starting home again, and to sort and arrange the botanical and mineralogical treasures they had gathered on the way, and which they now proceeded to examine under Gabriel's microscope.

The young Dutchman had a passion for botany, and would have been content to spend hours admiring, studying, and examining a rare flower or curious plant. This taste rather languished in the uncongenial air of Hebron; but to-day he had an opportunity of gratifying it, and he availed himself of it to the utmost.

Lena and Kathie had begun the study of mineralogy, and were now trying to test the progress they had made in the science on the stones they had gathered by the way.

The rock on which the little party seated themselves to rest would have formed an interesting study for any one, were he botanist, geologist, or merely a lover of the strange and beautiful in nature; it was of a dark shade of slate-grey, smooth and shiny, as if it had been varnished, and studded evenly all over with pale pink semi-opaque crystals. The lower half was covered with lichens of a bright red colour shading off into orange; and in its seams and fissures delicate, feathery grasses and fragile little white flowers were growing.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Pearl. "I wish I could carry it away with me."

"Why?" asked Gabriel, with one of his quiet smiles. "Cannot you thoroughly appreciate anything unless it is your own?"

"Of course I can. But whenever I see anything very beautiful or very curious I long to possess it. Is not that natural?"

"Very, and also very foolish."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because, for one reason, you never can become possessed of one ten-thousandth part of the beautiful things you will see around you."

"And pray, Mr. Philosopher, does the knowledge that you cannot possess a certain thing always prevent your wishing for it? Do you not sometimes long for things which will in all probability never be yours?"

"Very often, *very* often," repeated Gabriel, a little sadly. "But that does not prove that it is not foolish, does it?"

"By no means," returned Pearl saucily. "It only proves that you are guilty yourself of the fault you are reproving in me, which is very inconsistent; but, oh! I do believe I have found a specimen of that veritable beetle Mrs. Wylde wanted so much for her museum. Get it for me, please, Mr. Bernhardt; it is on that branch, just out of my reach."

With some difficulty Gabriel contrived to secure without injuring the little creature. He put it in the little box which Pearl always carried for the reception of such treasures, and placed his microscope over it. It was exquisitely beautiful, and with its gloossy, emerald back, its wings of golden gauze, and its legs and antennæ of silver, looked more like a rare and curiously-fashioned jewel than a beetle. Pearl was delighted with her treasure.

"I shall send it at once to Mrs. Wylde," she said. "She hasn't one like it in her collection. To what class does it belong, Mr. Bernhardt, and what is the name of these tiny bits of gauze above the wings?"

"Oh, not now, Pearl," said Kathie, laughing. "You must ask Mr. Bernhardt another time, for if you and he drift into an entomological discussion it will be sundown before we get back, and I dare say papa and the boys are already wondering what has become of us."

Yielding to Kathie that obedience which she never accorded to any one else, not even her father, Pearl, closing her box, rose to her feet, and they started on their homeward walk as quickly as the long, tangled grass would permit.

They found Mr. Milner and the boys lying luxuriously on a thick grass carpet shaded by willows, the large heap of fish that lay beside them testifying to their industry, and the success with which it had been rewarded.

In the cool, green gloom of the willows they spread their Christmas dinner.—Lena's plump roast fowls and cold tongue, Kathie's sandwiches and apricot tarts, the peaches, grapes, and bon-bons Ambie had sent from Kimberley, and the frosted cake which Mrs. Wylde had sent to Kathie all the way from Cape Town. A very merry dinner it was; if Kathie wondered sometimes where Gerald, poor, lonely, ruined Gerald, was spending his Christmas, or if her thoughts strayed away every now and then to where the grand blue ocean rolled and dashed in the sunshine, and where Ambie was spending the home Christmas which should have been so bright, and which she had spoiled for him, she soon brought them back from such profitless channels and devoted them to the business she had in hand. That business was enjoying to the utmost, and making the others enjoy, this long-looked-forward-to holiday. The conversation never flagged; every one was as determined as Kathie to avoid all allusions which might bring a cloud upon the horizon.

After dinner, which was as lengthy as it was gay, Mr. Milner betook himself with a book to the shadiest grassy dell, and read or slept the afternoon away.

"It is too hot to walk or to go beetle-hunting," said Pearl. "What shall we do, Lena? Remember it is Christmas, and it won't come again until this time next year. Let us do something that we can't do any other time."

"You must tell us what it will be then, for I am sure I don't know."

"Nor I; but suppose you tell us something, Mr. Bernhardt; tell us a story, a true one if you can. A real, solemn, gruesome, ghost story, if you know one."

"I am afraid that I do not know one that would please you; and don't you think that a ghost story would lose half its charm if told out here in the sunshine. To be properly appreciated a ghost story should be told in the evening in a dusky room, the company seated around a dying fire, the wind whistling around the chimneys, and the 'hoarse roar of the billows' heard faint and far off. I'm afraid that even the most prosaic South African ghost could not be induced to face this brilliant sunshine and have his august ears saluted by the birds' songs."

"Well, perhaps not; never mind the ghost then, but tell us something. You have travelled, and must have had some thrilling adventures."

"You forget that I am not Towser Chips," said Gabriel, smiling. "My travels have been, I assure you, of the very tamest description, and the greatest adventure I ever remember to have had was once when, having lost my way in the bush near East London, I laid down under a tree to sleep and had my hat and saddle-bag carried off by a baboon; but as I found the hat only a few yards off and managed to recover the bag before long, it was not much of an adventure after all, was it?"

"No. I wonder you are not ashamed to dignify it with the name."

"I am rather, but nothing more deserving of the name ever happened to me while on my travels. I have thought of something, though, which may interest you—a pathetic little story I read a short time ago in an Australian newspaper. But before I begin I must warn you that I do not know the end of the story, and that I have forgotten in what part of Australia it happened.

"Imagine a wild waste of waters—the waters of the

Southern Ocean—over which, but a few days before, a violent storm had raged. The wind blowing stiffly from the south and bringing the still uneasy waters tumbling and moaning in long, swelling billows on to the rock-bound shore, which is strewn with fragments, that bear testimony to the fury of the storm, and hint mournfully of more than one terrible tragedy which has recently occurred. On a great rock a man is sitting, his eyes watching a far-off white speck which is flying slowly, very slowly, landward. 'What can it be?' he wonders, and wishes he had brought his glass with him. Nearer and nearer it comes, looking every now and then as if just about to sink into the chill, hungry water, then rising higher, but never turning to the right nor to the left, keeping straight on, bending all its energies to the fulfilment of its task. Nearer and nearer, slower and slower, it comes on gliding over the water like a wraith; and the fascinated watcher sees that it is a great white bird to whose neck is attached something which seems to be weighing it down, and dragging it every moment nearer to the cruel death it is trying so hard to escape.

"The man presently sees, with increasing wonder, deepening interest, and also a faint dawning of superstitious fear, that it is an albatross—that wild, romantic, mystic bird about which seamen tell such strange tales. It is coming straight towards the rock on which he sits, and for a moment he feels half inclined to fly from the creature. But curiosity, and some unaccountable feeling stronger than fear, compels him to remain where he is and await the approach of the spirit-like bird. When it is within a few yards of the shore a huge wave dashes over it and draws it triumphantly down into its foamy bosom. For a moment it remains beneath the water, and the watcher fears that after all its brave efforts it has died almost within reach of the shore it has struggled so hard to gain. But the devoted albatross, with unnatural strength born of desperation (and who shall say what God-given determination to fulfil its mission?), rises once more to the surface, flies onward and alights on the rock beside the astonished man, and then, with a long, wailing cry, almost human in its agony and despair, it falls back dead at his feet.

"The man springs up awed, as if a soul had just fled from that still, white body. He can hardly believe that it has not. That death-cry was so intensely human, so unlike anything he has ever heard before. Tales he has read of

human souls entering the bodies of birds and beasts flash across his mind, and once more fear almost impels him from the spot; but just as he is about to go he catches sight of the something which is fastened to the bird's neck.

"It proves to be a small packet, which on tearing it open he finds to contain a letter—a letter, but written in something that is not ink, on something that is not paper, and in a language with which he is unfamiliar. What can it be, he wonders? What is the message which the mysterious bird of the sea has brought to him? Whose hand has traced those words which he cannot read. There is nothing to tell. He gazes long and intently at the albatross at his feet, already cold and stiff, then, after a while, flinging aside the superstitious fears which have taken possession of him, he bethinks himself of his employer, who is a Frenchman, and who may be able to read this strangely-brought letter. Reverently he lifts up the bird and lays it down on the beach out of reach of the tide, then, with the letter in his pocket, he proceeds to his master's farm.

"The master was a Frenchman; the letter was written in French. He soon mastered its contents. It was written by one who, with his companions in shipwreck and suffering, after several days on the angry sea in an open boat, without food or water, had contrived to reach an islet, a mere rock, and one of an uninhabited group at some distance from the Australian coast.

"'We are sick and exhausted,' the letter ran, 'starving and dying. If help does not come soon it will be too late.' The letter told the tale of sorrow and misfortune, and entreated help, but of the albatross it said no word. It did not tell how the strange, wild bird had been caught and sent on the mission it had so faithfully fulfilled. Somehow they had captured it and fastened to its neck the package, and in their anxiety and fear that the cord which fastened it would become loosened they had tied it too tightly around the devoted creature's neck, thus depriving it of the power to take food or water, unintentionally dooming it to the very death from which they had employed it to save themselves. Day after day, mile after mile, it had flown with the package, every effort to loosen which had only served to tighten it more firmly about its throat. How it had been enabled to keep up so long, found strength to travel over so many weary miles in agonising hunger and cruel thirst, to fly to the only spot on all that lonely coast where the letter could

have fallen into human hands, are questions to which there can be but one answer."

"Thank you," said Pearl, after a long pause, during which all the listeners were silent, profoundly touched by the pathos of the strange story. "That is better than any ghost story; and it is true."

"There is no reason to doubt it. The name of the man who found the bird and the name of his employer were given, and also that of the island from which the letter was dispatched; but I have forgotten all of them, I am sorry to say; but that detracts nothing from the beauty and pathos of the story. I think that it is true."

Another long walk, down the river this time, a long moonlight drive home, and they were back on Natal Kopje again, and Christmas Day was nothing but a memory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MIMOSA GROVE.

And now I am going to take my reader far away from Hebron, its dust and discomforts, its diamonds and disappointments, even seven hundred miles away, to a fair, fertile farm in Kaffraria, where a young life very different in every respect from Kathie Milner's was being spent.

Mimosa Grove was a beautiful farm, well wooded, well watered, and containing some very fine pasture and wheat lands. To be sure, Mr. Brown the owner, oftened complained that there were too many high, rocky krantzs and long, deep kloofs cutting up the land; but they added greatly to the picturesque beauty of the farm, and were the delight of his daughter Hetty's heart. She gloried in their cool, green shade, loving everything that grew in and around them, from the tall, wild plum-trees and Kafir Booms to the frail maidenhair ferns, and she would have been very unwilling to have had them turned into flat, green, grazing ground, or tame mealie-lands, if, as her father often wished, he could have so turned them. The farm had belonged to Mr. Brown for a good many years, and until the last three or four it had well repaid him for the care and labour he had expended upon it; and he had always been looked upon as one of the most prosperous farmers in the district. But of late, droughts, bad harvests, and sickness among his cattle

had visited him constantly, and the farmer, who in his days of sunshine had never dreamed of laying by a store for rainy weather, found himself in difficulties, and had a few weeks before his introduction to the reader decided upon selling his farm and stock and going to try his luck at Witwatersrandt, the newly-discovered and, according to all accounts, wonderfully rich gold-fields in the Transvaal.

Mr. Brown was a tall, broad-shouldered, athletic-looking man, hardy, healthy, and sunburnt, a walker and worker who never tired, a magnificent rider and a dead shot. He was clever, well-read, and well-informed, without having had many advantages in the way of education, and pleasant and well-mannered, without possessing a particle of what is called "polish." Brave and energetic, generous and large-minded, it was little wonder that he was extremely popular among his neighbours, liked and respected by his servants, and almost worshipped by his wife and children.

He looked the very picture of a bold, manly colonist, as, in his loose, rough clothes, broad-brimmed, felt hat, and with a great, heavy whip in his hand, he stood under his verandah shading his eyes from the morning sun and watching a slight figure on horseback which was coming, straight as an arrow, towards the house, taking bushes, rocks, and sluits in the way with a grace and fearlessness which brought a smile of proud approval to his lips.

"How Hetty rides," he exclaimed, turning to his wife. "Just watch her."

"Yes," she replied, coming to his side. "She does not know the meaning of fear. I should have been afraid to mount such a horse when I was a girl. She'll miss her rides when she gets to the Randt, I'm afraid."

"I expect she will; at any rate she won't be able to fly round alone as she does here."

The daring young rider had by this time reached the gate. Without waiting for any assistance, she sprang lightly to the ground, and after bestowing a smiling nod on her father and mother, and hanging to a spike of the fence the little tin can she carried, she led her horse around to the stable, and gave him into the charge of one of the half-dozen Kafir boys lounging idly about, with an injunction to lead him up and down for ten minutes before he gave him any forage.

There are very few faces that deserve to be described as beautiful. "Lovely," faces are not uncommon, "pretty"

ones are plentiful, and faces which we call "good-looking" and "nice-looking" abound; but it is very seldom that we meet with a really *beautiful* face. Nevertheless that is the only word which can truthfully describe Hetty Brown's. The expression was beautiful, the features were beautiful, and the colouring was beautiful. Her hair was a dark, rich auburn in the shadow, and glittered like threads of gold in the sun; her eyes, like brown stars, were now dark, soft, and lustrous, now bright and flashing, never the same for two minutes together; her perfectly-shaped mouth was firm and sensitive, showing sweetness and strength of character, and, whenever the lips parted, two rows of even, pearly teeth were displayed; her complexion was smooth and creamy with the softest, richest carnation bloom imaginable, and her smile was the very incarnation of sunshine; it well might be, for in all her nineteen years no shadow of real sorrow had ever touched her. She was not tall, scarcely reaching the medium height; but her figure was admirably proportioned, and her every movement was full of grace and freedom which bespoke perfect, absolute health and strength, and indeed Hetty had scarcely known a day's illness in all her life. Hetty was as sweet and good, as frank, generous, and unselfish, as she was fair to look upon. Her life had been all sunshine; but she had not grown selfish and self-absorbed in consequence, as is too often the case with those who have never felt the softening, widening influence of sorrow or loss. Perhaps this was due to the wise and gentle training of her mother, who, long before she was Hetty's age, had known her share of grief. Under that careful, pious rule she had grown up innocent and simple-hearted, a very child of nature, brave, high-spirited, fearless, and generous to a fault.

It was easy to see, by the looks of loving pride that rested upon her, as, having changed her blue riding habit for one of the simply-made print frocks which she always wore in summer, she came into the dining-room with the glow and sparkle of the fresh early morning about her, that she was the idol of both parents' hearts.

"Oh, mother! Why did you wait breakfast for me?" she exclaimed, glancing at the clock.

"I didn't wait for you altogether; your father has only been in a few minutes. But you must have been a long way, Hetty, you have been gone two hours."

"Yes, mother, I didn't mean to go so far; but I met Julia

and Tom Fraser, and they made me go to Groot Kloof with them. Look what I have brought back with me," and she held up her little tin can.

"Why, what have you brought?"

"Black brambles, mother; there are whole fields of them there. We shall be able to make a famous lot of bramble jam for the road."

"You may begin to pack for the Randt as soon as you like, Hetty," said her father significantly, as he took his seat at the table, and Hetty began to pour out the coffee.

She paused with the coffee-pot upraised and a cup half filled.

"Has Mr. Gregg——"

"Yes, Mr. Gregg gave me his answer this morning; he will take the farm and give me my price for it."

"Oh, father, that is good news! and the cows and horses too?"

"Some of the cows; he won't have anything to do with the horses. I think I'll go to King to-morrow and see Danvers. I think he'll take them. I'm not going to sell Tommy, Hetty."

Hetty smiled; Tommy was her own especial property.

"I knew you wouldn't sell him," she said, "and you won't sell Hamlet either, I hope."

"No, I can't part with Hamlet, nor with Oswald's pony."

Oswald Brown, a tall, well-built boy of fourteen, with a shock of rough, red hair, and a great amount of wrist protruding from his jacket, which he was continually outgrowing, was the only other child of the house. There had been other children, but they had all died in babyhood, and their little graves lay under the grove of great mimosas which gave the farm its name.

I wish I needn't sell the farm," said Mr. Brown, as, breakfast over, he stood at the door and gazed rather wistfully at the cornfields, glowing golden in the morning sun, and upon which he had bestowed so much thought and labour for so many years. "I'd much rather let it for a year or two if I could afford it."

"Never mind, father," said Hetty, slipping her hand through his arm. "Perhaps we'll get so rich up there that we'll be able to buy it back again soon."

Mr. Brown shook his head.

"I should not care to buy it back after Gregg has mismanaged it for years. I wish Fraser or French could have

bought it; but they couldn't afford to give me above half of what I want for it; so it's no use talking about it. It goes a little against the grain to sell, but it's the wisest thing we can do, I think, though some of my friends tell me I'll be a goose for my pains if I go to the Transvaal."

"Why do they tell you that, father?"

"Because they say that the gold does not exist there in half or quarter the quantity that some people think."

"How can they know that?"

"They can't know it any more than I can till they've been there to find out. No, I think we are doing the best thing we can, to sell out and go to the fields. Danvers thinks they are sure to turn out well, and he's been there, and is a man of considerable experience, having worked both in Australia and California; and if we are going, now's the time, while the place is new and every man has a chance. Ah, here's Pambani with Hamlet. I must ride over to old John Bent's to see about that waggon of his; I'd like to get it." And mounting his horse he cantered off.

Hetty stood at the door for a few minutes, watching his bold, fearless horsemanship, in much the same way as he had watched hers a little while before, then hurried away to strain and set the great pails of foaming milk which the Kafir boys were carrying into the dairy.

Something of sorrow and regret, and something of foreboding, oppressed Hetty's heart, as, a few days later, she walked about the garden in the warm mimosa-scented dusk. It was so easy to talk of going away and leaving the old home, but how would it feel when it really came to parting with all the dear inanimate things which she had grown up among, and which were a part of her very self. When the old house, the beautiful, rich, old garden, the familiar nooks where she had rambled and dreamed and read her favourite books; the cool, dusky fern kloofs, where the subdued music of the ringdoves could always be heard; the rocky hill where the harebells and the lavender grass grew in such wild profusion; and the broad grassy flat where she had gathered avond blooms, spring after spring for so many years, belonged to other people and were merely represented by the roll of bank notes in her father's pocket.

Tall and solemn the rows of blue gums stood tossing their branches and dark, leathery leaves against the pale sky. They seemed to droop reproachfully over her, as she walked

slowly beneath them, and the wind, which always took a sad tone when it passed through the leafless, dark beefwoods, sounded sadder than ever to-night, and seemed to say, "You are going to leave all your old leafy friends and the home where you were born, and where you have lived all your life. How will you bear to quit all you have known and loved so long?"

Hetty began to think that she could not bear it; and she hurried away from the black shadows of the trees and climbed the steep little hill at the bottom of the garden. Everything looked more cheerful from that point of view. She could see the light in the kitchen window, and the fireflies circling around the orange-trees, and hear the crickets chirping merrily, and the loud whistling and calling of the Kafir boys in the cattle kraal.

Of course it would be hard to go away and say farewell to the old home. "But," thought Hetty, "it is best to go now; a few more bad seasons and we should be ruined, father says, and get deeper into debt. I wish we could afford to pay uncle John before we go; but father says we must take with us as much ready money as we can."

Presently Hetty's eyes lifted themselves from the warm, fragrant, dusky earth to the sky, sought out the Southern Cross, and seemed to read a whole volume of comfort in its clear, unshadowed brightness. The stars would not be left behind, she could look at them every night when she was far away, just as she did now; they would shine down with as clear and bright friendliness, far away in Paul Kruger's land, as they did over the old home farm. And there was something else which could not be left behind, which would be as near to her here as there, even her Heavenly Father's love and watchful care. With that thought, that knowledge, she could not give way to regrets at parting or fears for the future, and she hurried with a light heart up the long garden path, which the rays of the pale, young moon were beginning to light faintly.

There was no one in the dining-room when she went in, though the lamp was lighted and the table set for tea. It was a rather small and somewhat shabbily furnished room; but it was part of Hetty's home and she loved it, with its brown-painted walls, its high, ugly mantelshelf, its horse-hair chairs and sofa, and its two small windows looking out over the hill. How bright, familiar, and homelike it was! How strange it would be to be sitting down to tea in

another room! She looked lingeringly around, then threw herself down on the hard, old sofa and fell into a long reverie.

"Tired, Hetty?" asked Mrs. Brown, coming in a little later and finding her with her eyes closed and her hands clasped under her head.

"No, mother, not tired, but the old sofa looked so inviting, and I remembered that very soon it will be somebody else's property, so I determined to enjoy it while I could. I know father will often send regretful thoughts after it when he is jogging along in the wagon. Poor old sofa! It's too bad to sell it; it will be like selling one of the family."

"I expect before long we shall be able to replace it by such a magnificent velvet couch as will quite put this poor old sofa to the blush," said Mrs. Brown, smiling.

"'Never say die,' eh, mother?" said Hetty, laughing. "Do you know I've been indulging in a little 'mild melancholy' this evening. Every tree and bush and even the old walls and fences seemed to be looking regretfully at me, and as if they were reproaching me for wanting to go away and leave them. But I've made up my mind that, whatever we leave behind that is good and pleasant and beloved, we shall find something better in its place."

"I hope so," replied her mother, smiling at her daughter's resolute tone. "And there is one thing which we cannot leave behind, which we cannot travel beyond, no matter where we go, and that is the protecting shadow of our Heavenly Father's love."

"That's just what I've been thinking, mother, and you can't think how it comforted me, and I've been thinking of that verse, 'If I take the wings of the morning,' you know."

"Yes; there are many comforting words and promises for the traveller; and after all, Hetty, we are not going so very far, we shall still be in our own country."

"Yes; but if we were meditating a trip to England, or America even, I dont think I should feel as if we were going half so far from home. To go to the Transvaal seems very like going out of the world altogether."

"It does. And, Hetty, now that the time is drawing so near, you must not shrink from all that we shall have to encounter. I mean the rough way of living and the rougher neighbours, and the discomforts we shall have to endure, perhaps for long, certainly at first. You must not shrink

from living in tents, or at best in a little uncomfortable iron house; and if we fail to get on there——"

"No, no, mother, you must not even hint at such a thing. We shall get on; we must get on. I am not going to dream of failure. No, I do not shrink from anything that the future holds for me. I *am* a little afraid of the rough life, but that is entirely on your account and father's, not on my own. If going to the Transvaal will only remove that care-worn, worried look from father's face that has taken up its abode there lately, it will be worth while to go, even if everything is twenty times worse than we anticipate; won't it mother?"

"Yes, I think it will, and I am glad that you are prepared to meet the parting from the old home and all the old friends in such a brave spirit."

"Oh, I am not brave, mother; I seldom allow myself to think of all the 'good-byes' we shall have to say. I am always painting delightful pictures for myself of what we shall do when we have made our fortune; how we'll go travelling all over Europe, America, and part of Asia, and then, when we have seen everything that's worth seeing, we'll come home and buy some lovely old place in the Western Province, and Oswald shall go to college, and father shall have the most beautiful horses, and you the most splendid carriage and the loveliest and rarest flowers, and I shall take lessons in music, French, and singing, and become wonderfully clever——"

"And when are we going to have and do all these fine and pleasant things?" asked Mr. Brown's voice from the doorway.

"Why, when we get the fortune that's waiting for us at the Randt, father," she replied, laughing and springing up. "How is Aunt Mary?"

"They are all well at East London, but rather shocked at the idea of our going so far, and they won't hear of your going away without paying them a visit first."

"There is no fear of our doing that," said Mrs. Brown. "I should not like to leave the Colony without seeing Mary first."

"Of course not; though if Witwatersrandt turns out as well as some people expect, it won't be long before John and Mary find their way up there too."

"How long will it be before we are ready to start, father?"

"I don't know. My part of the work is nearly done You and mother must decide to-morrow what you would like to keep of the furniture, and I will try to get rid of the rest at once."

"We shall want to keep as much as possible," said Mrs. Brown. "It will be poor economy to sell good, substantial, old furniture for a trifle, and then buy new up there, and pay double its worth for it. How much can we take with us?"

"Not a very great amount. I don't want to load too heavily, for I should like to be able to turn the wagons and oxen into money as soon as we get there, and if the oxen have a very hard trip they won't be worth anything when they reach their journey's end. We can take a few chairs and a couple of tables and a stove, and I suppose Hetty won't be willing to sell her piano," he added, smiling.

"Indeed, I will, father, if there's no room for it, and if the money will be of more use to us."

"Would you really be willing to part with your old friend? Well, I should not. I'd be very unwilling to sell the piano. You and I couldn't live without a little music now and then, I'm sure."

"How long do you think you can live without tea?" asked Mrs. Brown. "Do you know that it is past eight o'clock? Hetty, tell Alette to bring the tea."

And while the stout Hottentot girl, who looked the picture of neatness in her voluminous yellow print-dress and her white capje starched to board-like stiffness, carried in the tea-pot and a huge pitcher of boiling milk, Mrs. Brown took out of the large, old-fashioned cupboard a glass dish of orange preserve and another of green, transparent water-melon peel, and Hetty cut the biltong into crimson shavings, and they sat down to tea a very happy, hopeful party, although they were soon to leave the old home for ever, and their future prospects did not appear to be of the brightest.

"You had better go over to Mrs. French's to-morrow, Hetty," said Mrs. Brown as they rose from the table, "and take her the sewing work she promised to do for us."

"Yes, mother, Oswald and I can ride over the first thing in the morning."

"Not Oswald," put in Mr. Brown. "I want him with me in the morning, and I wanted Tommy too. I managed to lame Hamlet somehow to-day."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, father, I can walk just as well."

"If you wait till after dinner you can have the horses."

"Oh, there'll be no need to wait; the sooner we get the sewing work begun the better. Mother and I won't have time to do it all alone."

"Charlotte and Marion told me to say that you were to take all your sewing work to East London and they would help you."

Mrs. Brown laughed.

"When Charlotte, Marion, and Hetty get together it is not much sewing work they will want to do," she said. "No, no, we must finish all the work first and then Hetty will be able to enjoy her holiday. She won't want to go to East London for a week and take a week's work with her."

"No, indeed! I want to have time to ramble on the beach, row up the river, go to Bat's Cave, and ride out to the Nahoon mouth, and visit every place I know for the last time."

"I expect Marion will try to persuade Hetty to stay for her wedding," said Mr. Brown.

"She won't succeed then," replied Hetty quickly.

"You may stay if you like, and come up with the Elstones," said Mr. Brown, smiling, but half serious. Hetty shook her head.

"And let you and mother and Oswald go up to the Transvaal without me?" she exclaimed. No, indeed! I did promise long ago to be her bridesmaid, and I'll keep my promise if she will postpone her wedding until we return from the Transvaal; if not she will have to do without me."

It was a rule in the Brown household that no matter how much work was on hand none of it was to be done after tea, Mr. Brown being of the opinion that if people worked all day they had done enough, and if they had neglected or failed to finish the tasks which should have been performed by daylight, they gained nothing by spoiling their eyes over them by candlelight. Out of respect, therefore, to this opinion so often expressed, Mrs. Brown, instead of the sewing work she was so anxious to begin, took a book and a rocking-chair and sat down to read. Oswald established himself at the table with a glue-pot, scraps of wire, gauze, and silk, and began to manufacture flies for fishing; while Hetty and her father went to the piano. Mr. Brown sang well, and Hetty

possessed a very sweet, strong voice, which, though it had received little cultivation, was very pleasant to listen to, and their voices mingled harmoniously in songs and hymns until a late hour.

"Sell the piano, indeed," said Mr. Brown, when his wife had drawn his attention to the fact that the hands of the clock were pointing to eleven. "I'd almost as soon sell Hetty herself."

"I'd prove a 'sell' to whoever bought me," said Hetty, laughing. "You'd find a purchaser more easily for the piano, father."

"I don't know so much about that," replied her father mischievously. "I know some one who'd take you off my hands to-morrow if I liked; oh, I could dispose of you easily enough if I didn't want to take you with me."

"No you couldn't, father, not without my consent, and you'll never get that, so you'll have to give up all hope of ever getting rid of me."

"Very well," he answered, kissing her, "I'm in no hurry, I'll keep you till you want to go."

"And that will be never," returned Hetty decidedly.

"That is one reason why I am glad we are going away," said Mrs. Brown thoughtfully, after Hetty had gone to her room.

"What is a reason, Marion?"

"Why that—that George French is getting to care a great deal too much for Hetty."

"Let him; she doesn't care a straw for him."

"I know she doesn't. If she did it would be different. He is such a nice young fellow, such a good son to his mother, and so altogether well-disposed and superior in every way, that I should be sorry for him to have any trouble on Hetty's account."

"Oh, he'll get over it," said Mr. Brown carelessly. "It wont hurt him."

"I don't doubt it," replied gentle Mrs. Brown. "But he will get over it all the sooner if she is away."

CHAPTER XIX.

PACKING UP.

It was very early the next morning when Hetty sprang up and opened her window, letting in the sweet breath of mimosa flowers and roses, and letting in, too, the familiar, early morning farm sounds, which are always so pleasant, whether the listener be a stranger to them or has been used to them all his life. The lowing of cows and oxen, the bleating of sheep and lambs, the clucking of fowls, the gobbling of turkeys, the calling and whistling of Kafir boys, and soft and subdued, not drowned by the other sounds, but only seeming to mingle with them and refine and etherealise them all, the soft cooing of the doves, and the happy, jubilant song of the birds in the bush, and the gurgling of the little waterfall in the kloof.

Hetty stood for a long time listening and watching a company of bronze-blue sprews, as they sat on a heavily-laden peach-tree, helping themselves to the fruit, not with the caution and silence usually observed by thieves, but with a deafening noise and clatter. She watched them for a long time, particularly interested in one plump little fellow, who, in his anxiety to obtain the lion's share of the feast, kept up such an incessant fighting with the others as to defeat his own ends, for as soon as he turned to attack, with beak and wings, one bird that attempted to take a bite from the peach which he had determined should be his own exclusive property, the others gathered around it, and, burying their greedy little beaks in its juicy yellowness, obtained a large portion before he could drive them away again.

"Stupid little thing!" exclaimed Hetty. "Why does he not leave off fighting? There will not be a morsel of that peach left if he does not begin to eat soon. I didn't know there was so much human nature in birds; kings and statesmen might take warning from that little fellow and learn a——"

At this point Hetty's moralisings were brought to an end by a knock at the door and a call of—

"Coffee, Miss Hetty."

She opened the door and took the cup from Alette's hand, thanking her in the bright, kind, cordial way which was natural to her, and which had made her such a favourite with every man, woman, and child on the farm, black,

brown, or yellow. In a very little while Hetty was dressed and in the dining-room, where, early as it was, she found her mother busy.

"Where shall I find the work that I am to take to Mrs. French, mother?" she asked, after a very affectionate morning greeting had passed between them.

"It is in my room; but you are not going now, Hetty?"

"Yes, I think so, mother, she will have been up hours ago."

"I know; but if you walk there and back before breakfast you will be tired, and that will be a bad preparation for a long day's packing."

"It would take more than that to tire me, mother. I shall enjoy the walk, it is such a lovely morning."

"Very well, dear; go if you think it won't tire you."

The sun was just rising as Hetty set out; and as his bright rays fell upon the grass, their light was caught and refracted by the myriads of tremulous dew-drops that beaded the grass and sparked and glittered on the round spider webs which were spread over the trees like veils of jewelled gauze. The crisp freshness and fragrance of the early morning was over everything, and in the silence, unbroken except by the occasional far-off bleating of a lamb and the calls of the birds in the kloof, Hetty could hear the low, deep sound of the sea.

She took the road that led past the kloof; it was the longest way, but it was much the prettiest, and she did not care if the dewy grass wetted her feet and took the starch out of her freshly-ironed print; she must peep down for a moment and watch the daisies among the rocks, and listen to the peculiar bell-like sound the water made as it trickled down the side of the kloof and fell upon the hollow rocks below; she must gather a bunch of maidenhair fern and smell the jessamine flowers with the dew on them.

The grass was very long, and wetter even than Hetty had expected, and the great drops fell from the trees under which the path led her, and dropped in showers on her hat, by no means improving its appearance. But she cared very little for that, and she walked on with a heart as light as that of any of the birds that sang so loud and shrilly overhead. Now jumping over a stone or ant-heap, now stopping to loosen the hold which some wandering bramble had taken of her dress, now going far out of her road to get a long,

transparent stick of gum that hung icicle-like from some mimosa bough, or to peep into a bird's nest, she came at length to an opening in the trees, where the steep sides of the kloof sloped gently down to the gravelly bottom of the ravine, through the middle of which a limpid little stream trickled. The trees grew close together, met overhead, and were matted together by creepers and trailing plants. Starry white clusters of jessamine and wreaths of blue convolvoli twined and twisted themselves around the mossy old boughs, and hung in festoons from the topmost branches.

Hetty scrambled down to the bottom, startling some monkeys that were feasting upon the scarlet Kafir plums which were scattered about under the trees. They scurried away as she appeared suddenly in their midst, and climbing up into the trees a little way off, screamed and grimaced at her, and shook their little fists threateningly.

Hetty walked up the ravine and sat down on her favourite seat, a mossy old rock at the foot of an old Kafir boom, the pleasure of being in the beautiful, familiar spot heightened by the knowledge that she would not have many opportunities of revisiting it. All over the bank and in the hollows of the trees was maidenhair fern, all the stones were fringed with their delicate fronds, and little starry crimson flowers and velvety purple bells peeped out from amongst them, and the fragrant, wild gardenias massed themselves against the background of rocks and dark, glossy leaves. Her conservatory, Hetty always called that part of the ravine, and she recalled a hundred pleasant memories connected with it as she sat there lulled into forgetfulness of the errand on which she had set out by the dreamy murmur of the water and the twitter of the fledglings in the nests above. She was rather rudely awakened by something hard striking her head, from which she had removed her hat. She looked up and caught sight of one of the monkeys, whose breakfast she had interrupted, grinning at her from an opposite tree, and just about to aim another hard, green plum at her. Hetty laughed, and gathering up a handful of pebbles threw them up at him, and then fled before he had time to retaliate.

"What a long time I've wasted," she said to herself, as she scrambled up the bank again and took up her parcel. "But I had to pay the dear old kloof a visit. I wonder if there'll be anything half so beautiful near our new home. It will be strange to be living up in the Transvaal among

new scenes and faces, with everything I have been used to all my life changed and different. I wonder how it will feel. I wish I could draw back the veil that hides the future a little bit; but then I dare say I should be afraid to look, I might see something in the future that would take all the pleasure out of the present; and besides, if I knew everything that was going to happen, there would be nothing left to hope for."

Hetty had by this time struck into a little path which followed such a winding, zigzag course that it seemed as if it had determined not to bring the wayfarer to her destination, namely, the low, divided, blue-painted door of Mrs. French's kitchen. A Kafir woman stood a little way off, stamping mealies in a large wooden "stamp block," and singing at the same time a tuneless lullaby to the baby on her back, and several little Kafir children were squatting around the door, engaged in chopping up cabbages and lettuces for the ugly, awkward, young ostriches that stuck their heads through and over the fence of their paddock, and uttered little, unmusical cries and grunts expressive of hunger and impatience. The kitchen was empty and so was the dining-room, but Hetty knew where the busy farmeress would be found at this hour. She laid her parcel down on the great wooden settee and made her way to the cool grass hut where Mrs. French was engaged in skimming the thick, yellow cream from off her milk pans. She was a pleasant sight as she stood bending over her pans; a small, slight, active woman, looking the very embodiment of neatness in her scanty black dress and spotless white apron. Her sleeves were rolled up above the elbow, and on her head she wore a large hat of "palmiet" straw, plaited by her own hands. Every movement, as she skimmed the milk, poured the cream into the jars, and folded over them their spotless, white cloths, was full of energy and decision. One felt instinctively that whatever those swiftly moving brown hands undertook to do would not be relinquished until it was done, and done in the best possible way. Hetty stood for some time in the doorway unperceived; but presently Mrs. French's task was finished, and placing her skimmer in a dish of boiling water and drawing down her sleeves, she turned to the door.

"Why, Hetty Brown!" she exclaimed in her crisp, quick tones. "You *are* an early visitor."

"Not too early to be welcome, I hope," said Hetty, smiling.

"No, my dear, you could never come too early for that. Your visits have been like angels' lately, few and far between. But what did you come so early for?"

"I've brought you some work, Mrs. French."

"That's right; I was wondering when your mother was going to send it. I was thinking of going up to-day to get it myself, or sending George for it. We'll miss you, Hetty, when you're gone. George and I'll be lonelier than ever then."

"I shall miss you too, Mrs. French. If we write and send you a good account of the Randt, you'll come up, won't you?"

Mrs. French shook her head.

"I'll never leave the old farm," she said. "I've lived here ever since I was married, twenty-eight years ago; my husband lies buried here, and I'll be buried beside him, God willing. George may go if he likes and if he thinks he can do better there; I'll not stand in his light; but I'll never leave the old place myself. But come in, Hetty, I've something here to show you. Is this all the work you've brought me?" she exclaimed, as she took up the parcel Hetty had left on the sofa. "Why didn't you bring me more?"

"More, Mrs. French! Why, I was half ashamed to bring so much. I was afraid you would think I was trying to impose upon you."

"Not at all, you know I'm anxious to help you. I've been working for you all the week."

"Have you? I'm sure you are very kind. Would it be inquisitive to ask what you have been working at?"

"Well, for one thing, I've been plaiting hats for you and your mother. You'll need them; one gets so awfully sunburnt travelling with wagons. How long do you think the journey'll take you?"

"Father reckons about two months. He wants to go slowly for the sake of the oxen."

"Did you hear what a time the O'Brien's had, going up?"

"No, we've been wondering how they got on."

"They had a terrible trip; it hadn't rained for months before they started, you remember, and there wasn't a blade of grass for the oxen to eat after they left Queenstown, and scarcely a drop of water, and they were obliged to feed them on porridge, and then most of them died in the Free State, and poor, old O'Brien had to buy more. It came very hard

on him, for he couldn' have had much money to spare; in fact, I know he hadn't, for that son-in-law of his was a dreadful drag on him. Aren't you afraid to undertake such a journey? Fancy! Seven hundred miles or more in a bullock wagon! It's awful to think of. There," she added, taking two large sun hats from a box under the sofa. "This one's yours with the broad brim; I didn't make your mother's quite so big. Don't you think you'll be tired before the journey's half over?"

"No, Mrs. French, I expect to enjoy it very much; you know I've never been farther than Graham's Town in my life. Thank you so much for the hats, they are splendid"

"I'm glad you like them. I've made you some palmiet baskets too and some mats, they're so useful on the road; and here's something else I've made. I don't want you to forget me all at once, you see."

"There's no fear of that, Mrs. French," said Hetty. "I hope you will remember me as long as I shall remember you."

"There's no fear that I shall forget you; it is the young who forget the soonest, not the old. Well, this is what I've been busy about all the week." And she lifted the lid of a tolerably large packing-case, and disclosed to view four or five dozen bottles of jam and jelly, each bottle carefully sealed and bearing a neat, blue label. There were lemons preserved whole, and figs, black and white, Cape gooseberry jam, and bright golden jelly, pale green water-melon peel, peach and apricot, quince and guava, rich, dark red bramble jam and apple jelly.

"There," said Mrs. French, surveying the neat rows of bottles with pardonable pride. "I'd have made more if I hadn't run out of white sugar. Some people use yellow, but to my mind that spoils them, and I'd sooner not do a thing at all than not do it right. I'm sorry I couldn't do any oranges, but they're rather scarce just now. Old Bent has some, but he won't sell me any. He says his daughter wants to send them down to some friends of hers in Graham's Town, but that's all nonsense, for they'd be bad long before they got there. The fact is he is offended with George about something and he wouldn't oblige me. I was disappointed, for I wanted to make some orange preserve for your mother, you know she always says that no one preserves oranges like me. Well, I ought to be able to do it well, for I learnt it from my mother, and she did it better

than any one I ever knew. I'll do some yet and some citrons too if there's time before you go, and I want to make you some biscuits for the road, real hard Dutch biscuits that you have to soak for half an hour before you can eat them."

"You are very kind," said Hetty gratefully, touched by her old friend's thoughtful and active kindness. "But you really mustn't go to any more trouble on our account; you have taken enough already, and mother and I are going to begin making rusks and biscuits next week."

"That's nothing; you can't have too many. You'll find baking bread on the road a dreadful work, and you can't always bake either, for once you get into the Free State you won't get a scrap of wood; and you can't buy bread from the farmers there, at least, not unless you are prepared to pay a ridiculous price for it, and it's not fit to eat when you do buy it, for those Free Staters never put any salt in their bread. I travelled through the Free State six or seven years ago and I never want such another journey. I had a wretched time; it rained nearly every day, and we couldn't get a bit of fire lighted, sometimes not enough to boil a kettle, and every now and then the wagons would sink up to their axles in the mud and have to be dug out; and every river we came to was full. Oh! that *was* a journey. I came pretty near wishing myself dead before I got back."

"I hope we shall not have any such bad luck," said Hetty.

"I hope you won't; but, you know, people should always prepare for the worst while hoping for the best; and one way to prepare for such a journey is to get two or three sacks of biscuits. I'd have starved more than once on that journey if it hadn't been for biscuits and biltong. I used to be sorry for poor old George, for he had to be away from the wagons all day looking after the oxen. He'd take a pocket full of dry biscuits with him, and that was all he'd have to eat till he came back half frozen at night; and it wasn't often that we could manage to boil the kettle to make a cup of coffee then. No, Hetty, I hope you'll have a better time than we had. You've not forgotten to provide warm clothing, I hope, for the journey and for the Randt. They haven't a climate up there like you've been used to, I can tell you. It makes me shiver to think of the way the wind sweeps over those Free State flats. You won't want to put the tip of your nose out of the wagon till eleven o'clock in the morning."

"Is it so cold?" asked Hetty ruefully. "I am very sorry, for if there is one thing that I can't stand it is cold. Two days of chilly, windy weather makes me feel quite miserable."

"You must be prepared for it. Dress warmly and take plenty of blankets and rugs with you. Not the rubbishing, bright-coloured things they sell in the stores and call 'travelling blankets,' but good, thick, dressed sheep-skin, lined with blanket cloth; they're the things to keep the cold out."

All the time Mrs. French had been talking she had been setting the breakfast table, hurrying from the dining-room to the pantry, from the pantry to the kitchen and back to the dining-room again, with a swiftness and energy that almost took Hetty's breath away; at least it would have taken it away if she had not long ago grown accustomed to the busy farmeress' active movements. The unbleached table-cloth was scrupulously clean, the knives and forks were polished to the utmost of their capacity, the "electro" teapot was brighter than many a silver one would have been in a less careful housewife's hands. The brown bread was fresh and sweet, the butter just what butter should be, the yellow cream, slices of salt mutton, and a plate of crisp green lettuce leaves were all perfection in their way. The most fastidious person could not have found fault with Mrs. French's dainty table arrangements, and an epicure would not have grumbled at her cookery, at least, if he had he would have deserved to starve, for whatever she did she did well, otherwise she would have left it undone.

Hetty watched her admiringly for a few minutes, then took up her hat preparatory to taking her leave.

"Why, you are not going, Hetty?" exclaimed Mrs. French, stopping on her way to the pantry. "You're going to stay and take breakfast with me?"

"I can't stay, thank you, Mrs. French. I must get back early, there is so much to do. It makes me tired to think of all mother and I have to get through to-day."

"And will it make any difference whether you stay and take breakfast with me and then go home and begin to work or go home at once and have breakfast when you get there? Besides, I'm all alone; George went to King William's Town yesterday and he's not back yet."

I don't know which of these arguments had the most to do with changing Hetty's mind, but she permitted Mrs.

French to take her hat from her and consented to remain. Mrs. French added a dish of stamped mealies, a pitcher of hot milk, a plate of figs and peaches, a small brown jug of sour milk, and her breakfast arrangements were complete.

"Now come, Hetty," she said, seating herself at the side of the table and motioning Hetty to the tray. "You help the tea, I always get out of that if I can. George always does it when we're alone, you know; but he never will when there's company. Let me give you some of this cold mutton, Hetty. I can recommend it, I salted it myself; and you must try that lettuce, not the one with the crimped leaves, it's rather bitter, but the other's good, the finest I've seen this year; they grew near the dam and got as much water as they needed. Will you take a glass of 'amos'? No! Some buttermilk then. Neither? There's nothing like a cup of buttermilk with breakfast. English people laugh at us colonial farmers for using so much sour milk, but they don't know the good of it. There's many a London young lady might be glad to know what a fine thing it is for the complexion."

"Buttermilk good for the complexion?" exclaimed Hetty, laughing. "I never heard of it, I thought morning dew was the best."

"Perhaps it is if you walk three miles through the fresh air to get it, not unless. I never used any other cosmetic when I was young. You try it; though to be sure you don't need anything of the kind, your complexion's like—well, not milk and roses exactly, but like cream and carnations."

"Cream and carnations, Mrs. French? What a pretty compliment."

"It's not a compliment, it's the truth; though nothing's a compliment that *isn't* the truth, let me tell you. Well, don't forget, if ever you do want a wash for the skin you'll know what to use. I always used it when I was young, and I used to make George use it too."

Mrs. French looked quite serious, but Hetty could not help smiling; the idea of tall, stalwart George French, the clever agriculturist and successful sheep-farmer, who was so grave and sensible, washing his face in buttermilk for the good of his complexion was really too absurd.

After breakfast Mrs. French detained her young favourite, first to look at the ostriches just ready for plucking, promising her the longest, whitest plume for her hat; next to see how

nicely her last brood of young goslings was coming on; then to show her new black Kerry cow, George's latest investment; and then somewhat reluctantly permitted her to go.

Hetty hurried straight home over the breezy hills; there was no lingering this time to gather gum or mimosa flowers, and she reached home just as they were all rising from the breakfast table.

That was a busy day. Hetty and her mother made an inventory of all the furniture and decided what was to be kept and what to be sold.

"Dear old piano," said Hetty, running her fingers over the keys. "I'm glad you're not going to be sold, though I'm afraid father's rather extravagant to keep you; and, mother, we are not going to part with grandma's easy chairs, are we?"

"No, not grandma's chairs nor her little ebony table, they must go with me wherever I go."

"And the books, are we going to take them?"

"I think so, we have not very many."

"No; and they are all old friends," said Hetty affectionately patting the covers.

"Old friends, yes, and they would not fetch much at a sale."

"Oh, it would be too bad to sell them, poor old things; and those we can't take we can give to Mrs. French."

"To be sure we can, and, Hetty, I think it would be a good idea to pack up the crockery we are not using, and then that would be out of our way."

For an hour or two they worked away in dust and silence, and at one o'clock Hetty cleared a corner of the littered table, and she and her mother sat down alone to an Arcadian repast of biscuits, milk, and peaches; her father and Oswald were both away.

In the middle of the afternoon they were interrupted by the arrival of a lady who drove her cart up to the gate in dashing style and called to Alette to assist her to alight. She came into the room where Hetty and her mother stood surrounded by a heterogeneous mass of plates, dishes, basins, packing cases, straw, and old newspapers, laughing heartily at some speech of one of the Hottentot girls. It was characteristic of Mrs. Fraser that she was always laughing, "fit to kill herself," as she expressed it. Another of her characteristics was, that although an English woman, she

nearly always spoke Dutch, or a mixture of Dutch and English.

"Ach, Hetty, mijn kind," she began, sinking heavily down into an easy chair, and seizing a newspaper from the table to fan herself with. "It is a hot day. Bring me something to drink before I die, not tea or coffee, please, something cold. Oh! Mrs. Brown, I pity you, I wouldn't be you for anything."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Brown, smiling, partly at the lady's panting exhaustion and partly at her rueful expression.

"Oh, because you're going away, and to the Transvaal of all places in the world. I can't think how you can bear to leave this mooi, old place that you have lived on so long and done so much to improve."

"You have been up in the Transvaal, Mrs. Fraser," said Hetty eagerly, returning at that moment with a glass of buttermilk and a plate of figs. "Tell us about it."

"Well, you know that the Vaal River's on the south of it?"

"Yes," replied Hetty, laughing, "we know that, and that the Limpopo's on the north of it, and that Natal's to the south-east of it, and that there are gold reefs running all through it, and I believe that's about the extent of our knowledge."

"Well, if I were you, I wouldn't want to know anything more about it; you won't like it, Hetty, I can tell you, it's a nasty place. But you won't stay there long," she added. "You'll be getting married to some rich fellow before long, and coming back, or going to England," and she lay back in her chair and laughed as if she had perpetrated the best joke in the world.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," replied Hetty. "I'm not so silly as you seem to think me, Mrs. Fraser."

"Look at her," cried Mrs. Fraser, still laughing, and pointing her newspaper fan at Hetty. "No, I don't think you're silly at all. But there's nothing silly in getting married to a *rich* man that I know of. I wish I'd been that silly when I was young, I should have been better off I know. But you want me to tell you what the country looks like. I never went farther than Potchefstroom. It was winter when we got there, and most horribly cold; the ground was white with frost till ten in the morning, and that was something I wasn't used to, and I didn't like it, I can tell you. And then the place is smothered in willow-trees, the

biggest ones I ever saw, and with their yellow leaves falling and rustling and covering the ground with a thick carpet; they made the place look terribly dismal, and every house stands in its own orchard, and all the hundreds and hundreds of apple, peach, and pear trees were bare, and all the quince hedges. There was not a green thing about the town except a few blue gums and cypresses. And the dreadful lot of water that's about."

"Where does the water come from?" asked Kitty.

"From the Mooi River; it runs through every street in broad, shallow streams, and if you go twenty yards you have to cross it almost as many times."

"It must look pretty," said Hetty interestedly. "Are there bridges?"

"Bridges!" repeated Mrs. Fraser scornfully. "They are bridges. The trunk of an old willow thrown across the water is the only bridge they have in most places, or a flat stone. I slipped into the water three times in one evening. I was wild I can tell you, for it was bitterly cold, and I had my best dress on and it got completely spoilt. Mr. Fraser laughed at me; but he laughed the other way the next stream we came to, for he fell in himself. I won't say I didn't push him just the least bit in the world, but he deserved it. We didn't stay in Potchefstroom long, so I can't tell you what it looks like in summer; but everybody says it's a nice place then. Fruit is plentiful and as cheap as dirt; one can have as much as one likes for the picking. I can't tell you what Witwatersrandt is like; a barren mountain range I believe, and very cold. Ach, it's too bad of you to go away, Mrs. Brown, and leave your old place; you'll never get a better farm."

"I don't expect we shall," said Mrs. Brown. "We should not wish to leave it if we could afford to stop."

"Well," replied Mrs. Fraser cheerfully. "I hope you'll come back soon with a pot of money and buy the old place back. Have you heard what a fortune young Springly made up at Barberton?"

"I heard that he had done very well up there."

"He just has; he made forty or fifty thousand pounds, and came back and paid all his father's debts, and I believe they're all off to England next month. Ja, so goes it in the world, some go up and some go down. I hope you'll go up, Mrs. Brown; and if you must go I wish we could have bought your farm. It, together with our own, would make

a splendid place, just what I'd like; if I had that, I wouldn't call the queen my——uncle. How'll you like leaving all your East London friends, Hetty? You'll miss your cousins, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall, very much. I wish they were coming too."

"You'll go to see them, I suppose, before you leave."

"Oh, yes, I am going down to East London for a week when the packing is finished, and then I'm coming home to take care of father while mother goes."

"That's right, and you and your mother must come and spend a day or two with me before you go. But I'm hindering your work with all my talking. Here, Hetty, give me some work to do and let me help you, or you'll be wishing me away, and I don't want to go till it's a bit cooler."

"No," said Mrs. Brown; "I won't give you any work to do, you've been busy enough all the morning, I know. Sit here and rest and talk to us; we will go on with our work if you won't think us rude, for we are very anxious not to keep Mr. Brown waiting for us when he has finished his part of the business."

"Of course I won't think you rude, don't I know what packing up is? I'm sure I've done my share of it in my time, and somebody else's too. But I'm not going to sit here in idleness and watch you work. Give me that piece of sewing work, Hetty, whatever it is, and let me go on with it. No, you needn't offer me your thimble nor your mother's either, they won't fit me. I think I brought mine with me; here it is." And removing her hat and motioning Hetty to bring her a footstool, she settled herself comfortably to sew, and for the space of nearly five minutes she stitched away diligently, then she laid down her work, and, looking round the room, exclaimed, "You have got lots of work before you. It makes me think of the war time to see you packing up to trek, only you've not got to do it in such a hurry as we had then."

"No, indeed," replied Mrs. Brown. "I am thankful it's for no such reason that we are packing up now."

"You may well be thankful. Wasn't that a time though? The packing up was bad enough, and hurrying off at last leaving half our things behind us; but when we got fairly into laager, and were crammed, with half a dozen other families, into a little shanty not more than three times the size of this room, with our kraals of cattle, sheep, and goats

around us, and the heat and drought, and the fever, and the constant 'scares,' and the ill-temper—for every one fell out with his neighbour before we'd been boxed up together a month—I'll never forget it. Did I ever tell you about a scare we had once all over a bag of mealies? 'The Mealie Bag Scare,' we called it. Oh, dear!" she added, laughing in her peculiarly hearty, ringing fashion. "You people who went to East London, if you had none of the frights, were out of all the fun too. Though, to be sure, we didn't think it fun till afterwards. It happened one Saturday night. Everybody had gone to bed except half-a-dozen or so of men who patrolled the village. I shared my bit of a room with old Mrs. Simpson—you know her, what a restless, fidgetty old body she always was—well, about eleven o'clock she woke up and took it into her head that some one was stealing the mealies she had stored in a hut outside. I told her it was all nonsense, but she wouldn't listen to me; she must needs go out to see who was about the place. But first, if you please, she got her pistol and loaded it. It was a rusty old thing, and I was always afraid that it would burst in her hands and kill her or somebody else. She got all ready and out she marched. Well, I wasn't going to let her go alone, so I marched out after her."

Here Mrs. Fraser laid back and indulged in a prolonged peal of laughter.

"I can't help laughing when I think of that night," she declared. "To think of us two old muffs stalking about in the middle of the night to catch the thief, she with the pistol and I carrying the light. We went first into the kitchen, but there was nobody there but Mrs. French's Hottentot woman, Mejii, asleep on the floor. Mrs. Simpson gave her a push with her foot, asking her how it was she didn't wake up when thieves were breaking into the place. Then she went to the window to take a look before venturing out; but just as she peeped out, a black face with great rolling eyes looked in. It turned out to be a Fingoe servant of old tanta Muller's. She had been taken ill in the night and had sent him to me for medicine; but poor old Mrs. Simpson thought it was nothing less than Sandilli and all his Gaikas arrived, and what did she do but fire slap through the window at the fellow. He gave a loud yell of terror and rushed off over the fence and through the sheep kraal. Then there got up such a row and hubbub as you never

heard. Every one woke up, every one screamed, some one rang the church bell, which, you must know, was the signal agreed upon in case of an attack. No one knew what was the matter, and all thought that the Kafirs were upon us. If any one asked, 'What's the matter?' some one shouted, 'The Kafirs have come, run to the church.' And run to the church they did, pell-mell, carrying bags, bundles, and babies, and anything and everything they could lay hands on. We were in a fine state of mind, Mrs. Simpson and I, hearing the bell ring and all the noise, for of course we didn't dream that it was the old woman's shot that had roused every one. We dressed ourselves in less time than we ever did before and started off, she to the church, and I to hunt up my husband and the boys. But before I got to Watt's store, where they slept, I met my husband and young George French coming to look for me. For a little while there was a great deal of noise and excitement, but by-and-by, as nothing was seen or heard of the Kafirs, everybody began to ask everybody else who had given the alarm, who had rung the bell, who had fired the shot, and so on, and then the whole thing came out, and if there wasn't a laugh! Of course every one was down on poor old Mrs. Simpson, and afterwards it was called 'Mother Simpson's Scare,' but that made the old woman so angry that it was changed to 'Mealie Bag Scare.' For months afterwards the boys never met her without asking if she'd seen anything of the Kafirs. It was a grand joke, but it wouldn't have been much of a joke if the Kafirs had really come, for there weren't above twenty men in the place, and I don't believe there was a woman who could or would have fired a shot except me and Mrs. French, and, of course, old Mrs. Simpson."

"My experiences of the war were rather pleasant," said Hetty. "Marion, Charlotte, and I used to go to school all the mornings and play about the beach or row up the river with Uncle John in the afternoons."

"Yes, I expect you youngsters had the best of it, you always do, of everything. I was glad enough when it was all over, and we could come home again. We quite expected to see our house burnt down, and weren't we glad when we found it wasn't. Well, well, well, I haven't done much work, have I; and it's almost time to go. Mr. Fraser'll be wondering what's become of me, and Julia'll be in a state of mind thinking that she'll have to get tea ready and give the Kafirs their rations. Why, here's Mr. Fraser himself,"

she added suddenly. "Come to hunt me up, I suppose. I wonder what he means by it."

"Never mind, Mrs. Fraser," said Hetty comfortingly. "Now you won't have to drive those horses home."

"Yes, there's some comfort in that. Well, Charles," as a tall, ruddy man, wearing a somewhat soiled white jacket and a battered straw hat appeared in the doorway, "so you've come to look me up."

"Good-day, Mrs. Brown. How do you do, Miss Brown? No, I didn't come to look for you; but I'd have come with you if I'd known you'd been coming. Why didn't you tell me."

"Because I thought you were busy down in the lands; I knew you ought to be if you weren't."

"Humph, well I've come to drive you home; you won't grumble at that, I suppose. Going to sell your books, Mrs. Brown?"

"No, Mr. Fraser, we are going to take them with us."

"That's wise, I think, I hate to see people selling good books. There's nothing like reading."

"I don't care for it," put in his wife. "I seldom open a book; I don't know what people see in reading."

"You'll read 'Handy Andy,'" said Mr. Fraser, in a tone which implied that if Mrs. Fraser would only overcome her prejudices so far as to read "Handy Andy," she would never be indifferent to the charms of literature again.

"No, I won't; I'll leave books to you and Julia; I don't want them. Are you ready to go home, Charles?"

"Well, I wanted to see Mr. Brown; but I hear he won't be back for a good while, so perhaps we'd better go, and I'll look him up this evening. Did you have the horses outspanned, Maria?"

"No, I forgot all about them, poor things! And they've been standing in the sun all the time; but never mind, perhaps it'll quiet them down a bit. They tugged at the reins so coming, that my wrists were nearly dislocated. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Brown; just remember that our place is not fifty miles off. Good-bye, Hetty mijin kind; when are you coming up to see Julia? I'll send her over to help you pack whenever I can spare her;" and laughing, nodding, and waving her hand, the good-tempered woman drove off over the hill under the lengthening shadows of the mimosa trees.

"I hope I'm not inhospitable," said Hetty, as she turned

back to her packing. "But I wish Mrs. Fraser hadn't come this afternoon; we could have done so much more if we hadn't been interrupted."

"Never mind," replied her mother. "We have done enough, and we can't do everything in one day, you know. Let us leave the packing now; you go into the garden and cut some grapes for tea, and I'll tidy up here."

"No indeed, mother; you go and get the grapes, and I'll do the tidying."

CHAPTER XX.

A "PLEASANT LITTLE" THUNDERSTORM.

"WHERE is your cook, Kathie?"

"I don't know, papa; is he not in the kitchen?"

"No, he is not; and there is no fire, and the tea things are not washed up."

"I wonder where he is gone? He had no right to go without asking leave."

"He is a good-for-nothing fellow, like all the rest of his race. Well, I can't wait for breakfast; I must go to the claim; I've three days' gravel to wash, and I want to begin early. I hope I shall find something to-day; if I do not, I shall have to write to Cape Town for some more money. Leave the fire, Kathie; I will send one of the boys from the claim to help you to-day, and we must try and get some one to take Janjie's place if he doesn't come come back, and I don't suppose he means to, for I paid him yesterday."

Kathie proceeded to tidy up the dining-room and set breakfast, and by the time she had finished the assistant her father had sent arrived—a great surly Kafir with a dirty pipe in his mouth and a greasy old hat on his head, which he did not attempt to remove at the sight of his young mistress. He knelt down in front of the stove, and began slowly chopping up vaal-bush roots, all the time puffing great clouds of smoke from his pipe.

"Be quick," said Kathie, after watching him for a few minutes in silent disapproval. "Light the fire quick and make the water boil; the master has not had his breakfast yet."

The man stared at her insolently and uncomprehendingly for a minute, then continued his slow chopping and puffing.

"He's a likely looking young man, isn't he?" said Pearl from the doorway, where she stood surveying the scene. "He won't have that fire lighted by dinner time. I'd rather do it myself for ever and a day than have such a creature in the kitchen."

"So would I; but papa sent him, and told me to leave it to him, and he would be vexed if we didn't let him do it. We must put up with him to-day and try and get some one else to-morrow. I'll go and cut the bread, and when the water boils, if ever it does, we'll take papa his breakfast. Will you take it to him?"

"Yes; but, Kathie, where did you put the bread last night? It's not in the pantry."

"I put it in the cupboard. Look again, Pearl, it must be there."

Pearl searched again, but failed to find the missing loaves.

"It is of no use, Kathie, it is gone. That dog has paid us a visit again."

"Oh, dear! what shall we do?" exclaimed Kathie wearily. "It is so late, and it will take that man an hour and a half to go into the town and buy more, even if he will consent to go. However, I must try and persuade him, I suppose."

Accordingly she turned once more to the sulky, greasy Kafir, and in her most winning tones asked him his name. He shook his head and grunted out that he did not understand.

"That is not true," said Syd. "He does understand; papa spoke English to him yesterday and he understood him well enough."

The fellow glared savagely at the little boy, proving that at any rate he understood *him*, but still persisted in shaking his head uncomprehendingly.

"Intoni igamalako?" she asked in her best Kafir, determined to give him no excuse.

"Igamalam."

"Ewe."

"Toors (George)."

"Ah! Very well, George, I want you to go into the town and buy some bread—some "sonka"—do you understand?"

George stared blankly for a moment or two at his columns of smoke, then grunted out:

"Ewe."

"Take this basket, then, and this money, and come back quickly. Run all the way; it is very late."

He took, or rather snatched, the basket from her hand, and coolly set it down on the table; and pulling a knife and a piece of tobacco out of his pocket, proceeded to cut the latter into small pieces.

"Oh, you must not stop for that," cried Kathie in despair. "Take the basket and go at once. Do you not see that I am waiting for the bread?"

He took up the basket then very reluctantly, and walked to the door, pausing, however, when he got there to fill and light his pipe, after which he shuffled off very slowly in the direction of the town.

"We'll be lucky if we see him back by twelve o'clock," said Pearl. "By-the-by, Kathie, the water is nearly all done."

"Is it; how much is left?"

"A little more than enough to fill the kettle."

"Is that all? We must send for some at once then. Syd, you will have to go to Mr. Boon, and ask him to send us up a cask at once; and you had better go past papa's claim, and tell him that we will send his breakfast as soon as the bread comes. Oh, and, Sydney, after you have been to Mr. Boon I want you to go to the washerwoman and tell her to come this morning. You know where she lives, do you not?"

"Yes; but she won't come, Kathie; she said the last time that she wouldn't wash for you again if you didn't give her more money."

"She need not not come then, we are giving her quite as much as we can afford already; indeed I was going to tell her that we should have to give her less if she did not do her work better. However, tell her to come, and if she will not we must get some one else; I am growing tired of her and her insolence."

Poor Kathie! She was growing tired of a great many things. Tired of heat, dust, and discomfort, of uncongenial tasks, of dirty, insolent, incompetent servants, and unspeakably tired of all those petty, sordid, vexing worries which of all trials are the most irritating to the temper and wearying to the mind.

Very, very few diamonds had been found since Christmas —it was April now. The money was not coming in, but it was going steadily out all the time; and though they prac-

tised the strictest economy, something very new and strange to them—every month found them in more straitened circumstances. The list of Kathie's daily trials would sound trifling if written down—perhaps even ludicrous. But they were very real trials, nevertheless, and very hard to bear patiently, and yet it was very seldom that she permitted her weariness and distaste to have any outward manifestation, save such as was given by languid movements and pale cheeks.

By half past ten Kathie was able to send her father his breakfast, and at one he came home to dinner. She thought she had never seen him look so weary and downhearted. He had been washing all the morning, and had found only one small, brownish diamond, the worth of which was barely sufficient to pay for the water he had used. He sat down wearily, and pressed his hands to his temples.

"Have you a headache, papa?" she asked, after watching him for a few minutes with tear-filling eyes, and very bitter feelings towards Mr. Durwood in her heart.

"No, dear," he answered, raising his head, "I am a little tired, that is all, and this heat is very trying. I am disappointed too, for I quite expected to find something in that gravel; it looked so good. Never mind, better luck this afternoon perhaps." The words were hopeful, but the tone was sad, and weary beyond expression.

Kathie turned hastily away and busied herself with setting the table. She tried to make the meal look as inviting as possible, but, before the cloth had been spread many minutes it was powdered with fine, red dust, and the heat poured fiercely down through the canvas, and the fat roast mutton, and the small unwholesome-looking potatoes, which was the only vegetable they could procure, looked anything but tempting.

"Oh, papa, do not go yet," said Kathie, as Mr. Milner took up his hat after dinner. "Do wait until it gets cooler."

"It will not get cooler until the sun goes down," he replied, "and I am anxious to wash all that gravel. I may find something, and if not, there will still be time to write to Durwood before the post leaves. I can't wait. By the bye, how does George manage in the kitchen? Is he any good?"

"None at all. Do not deprive yourself of his services in the claim for the sake of any help he gives me, papa; I

would as soon have no one, in fact I should prefer to be without him."

"Very well, we must try and get some one else. Perhaps Miss Bernhardt can tell you of a Hottentot woman who is willing to cook. She might suit you better than any one of those Kafir or Zulu boys, who are intolerably dirty and insolent."

"Yes, I can ask Lena to-morrow. But, papa, I think we could manage very well without a servant at all, at least, until the diamonds become more plentiful."

"No, indeed, you shall not try," he answered decisively. "You cannot manage without help, you do enough already, and too much, Heaven knows."

Kathie knew how distasteful to her fastidious father was any discussion of these petty domestic matters, so she said no more; but she wished he would consent to let her and Pearl do the work and so save the ten shillings a week which a servant cost. That ten shillings should have come to be important to them!

Mr. Milner walked away slowly through the quivering heat, and the two girls watched him until he was out of sight; then returned to the tent, and began in silence to clear away and wash up the dinner dishes, which they would not for the world have permitted the dirty grimy Kafir to touch.

"Come, boys, we will have lessons," called Kathie, when the tent was swept and dusted, and she had laid aside her kitchen apron. "Are you going to Lena's to practice this afternoon, Pearl?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Pearl listlessly. "It's too hot, and I don't care if I never see a piano or touch a note again. I do not, Kathie. What is the good, I should like to know, of learning, and practising, and grinding at French, and grubbing away at German verbs and Latin roots week after week and month after month. I am tired of it, and I am tired of this kind of life. I wonder when it is going to end? We have been here eight months, and what sort of a life have we led? Out in the cold, out in the heat; drenched with rain and smothered with dust; pinching and screwing, papa working like any labourer outside all day, the money going out all the time and none coming in. I know very well that that Durwood is cheating papa, and papa thinks so himself, only he won't say so. I do wish Mr. Hildyard had charge of papa's affairs."

"I wish he had, but it is too late to think of that now; we must try and make the best of things as they are. Nothing will be improved if we give way to despair. And," she added, smiling, "you will feel better to-morrow when the weather is cooler and we have a better servant, and you can change that soiled dress."

"Possibly; but I don't want to *feel* better if things are not going to *be* any better, and I don't see any chance of their improving. Even if papa should find a diamond to-day what difference would it make? I wish, I wish we could go to Witwatersrandt."

"What could we do there?"

"We could do all sorts of things that we cannot do here. Papa might sell Mosswood, or let it to someone who would pay a proper rent for it, and pay it regularly as Durwood does not; and you and I might keep a school. You are highly educated and accomplished and all that, and I'd make a very tolerable assistant. Of course, we should have to put our pride in our pockets, but then we do that here every day, so it wouldn't matter."

"Yes, we might, if papa were willing, but I do not think he has given up the hope of Gerald joining us here."

"That's just what is ruining us," interrupted Pearl. "Papa goes on hoping and working, and it's all for nothing. Gerald is not here and will not come here, and there are no good diamonds left in this place, and if there were and papa were to find one to-morrow he would not get half the worth of it. I repeat I am tired of it all, and I wonder what is going to become of us. We are getting poorer all the time, and if we stay much longer we shall become so poor that it will not be possible for us to go away to some place where we might do better."

Kathie said nothing; Pearl was but giving utterance to her own fears. That Durwood, the smooth-tongued lawyer, was not dealing honestly with them she had for some time suspected, and that her father would before long be reduced to the necessity of selling Mosswood she was certain. Mr. Milner worked on day after day and week after week, in the hope that every day would bring the fortune he sought and the son for whose presence he longed so earnestly, and meantime the stock of money in Cape Town was becoming sadly reduced.

It was of little use, however, to brood over the past or grow anxious about the future; it served but to awaken

that host of regretful "if onlys," which were always so easily aroused and which made her unfit to meet and cope with the trials and difficulties of the present. Remembering this, Kathie dismissed them, and tried to leave her future and that of her dear ones in the hands of One who could make no mistakes, who would not lead them down any path in which they ought not to walk, and who would not give them one grief or sorrow which, if taken as from Him and borne in faith and patience, would not be for their good in the present as well as in the time to come.

As the day wore on the heat grew more intense, and presently great black clouds rolled up and covered the sky, and while Kathie sat too busy to notice the change, she was startled by a loud clap of thunder and a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a downpour of rain. She sprang up and began hastily collecting all the loose articles that lay scattered about, and, piling them upon the table, she drew the chairs away from the sides of the tent, and running out through the shower, brought back an armful of vaal-bush sticks and roots into the kitchen, that they might not be wet when the fire had to be made for tea. Then she returned to the tent and sat down to wait until the storm should be over. She was beginning to dread these frequent and severe thunderstorms, and this one threatened to be even more than usually violent.

The rain came down in floods, and in a few minutes little rivers, broken by numerous cataracts and rapids, were running down the road. Broad lakes were formed in every direction; the thunder rolled and roared, the terrible forked lightning flashed incessantly, and before very long several streams made their way into the tent; which, as the floor was of hard and well beaten ant-heap, could not be absorbed, and a lake was very soon formed in the middle of the room and deepening and widening every moment. Kathie and the boys mounted on to the table, and presently Pearl appeared at the doorway, drenched and dripping.

"Our tent is down," she gasped, as with a spring she reached the table and began wringing the water out of her hair.

"I held the pole as long as I could, but I had to let it go at last. You should just see everything—pillows, blankets, and clothes. When the tent fell the trunks were thrown over, and their contents were emptied on to the floor."

"And you are drenched," exclaimed Kathie in dismay.

"Yes," replied Pearl, laughing and shivering. "When I let the pole go several gallons of water that had collected in the hollow of the canvas poured over me and gave me a complete shower bath. I wonder if papa has taken shelter anywhere."

"I hope so indeed. I hope he will not think of walking home in this downpour. Pearl, I believe this tent will go down next, the wind is getting stronger every minute."

"I know it will, the poles are quite loose and the ropes are nearly worn through."

"I wonder where George is," said Kathie, wading through the water to the door and trying to peer out; but the rain and sharp, jagged hailstones drove her back to her seat on the table, which by this time was an island surrounded by a three-inch deep sea of brownish-red water, on which the boys' straw hats were gaily floating. The storm continued to increase in violence, and the girls sat shivering on their perch, awed into silence by the appalling claps of thunder that shook the very earth beneath them, and the terrific flashes of lightning that darted incessantly across the black heavens. The rain fell, not in showers, but in sheets of water, and the tent poles swayed more and more alarmingly. They had been planted in August by Towser Chips, but eight months of wind and storm had considerably loosened them, and all at once, when a gust of wind more furious than any of the preceding ones struck the tent, they lurched over, lost their hold of the soft wet soil, and before the affrighted occupants of the tent had time to spring from the table they were thrown to the ground and buried beneath an overwhelming mass of wet canvas. The cupboard, on top of which stood a tray of cups and saucers, went over, and half a dozen chairs were smashed at once.

Half-stunned, Kathie dragged herself from under the superincumbent weight of canvas and water, and assisted Pearl and the boys to rise.

Drenched with water, covered with red mud, and bruised and dazed by the fall, they were a sorry group.

"Halloa! Are you all alive there?"

Never had the rough and somewhat nasal tones of Towser Chips sounded so musical, never had he been more welcome than now, as, with his face and hair streaming with water, his hat gone, a spade in one hand, and a coil of rope in the other, he waded into the tent, or rather into the square space where the tent had been.

"Well, if this ain't too bad," he exclaimed, apostrophising the prostrate chairs and table. "Everything a reg'lar smash. I knew the old boss wasn't at home, so I thought I'd come and see how you was gettin' on. This is the biggest storm we've had for one while; there's a stream runnin' down the road strong enough a'most to take a man off his legs. I see your kitchen's still standin' Miss Milner, you jest go in there, and I'll have this tent and t'other one up again in a brace of shakes."

"You are very kind Mr. Chips," Kathie replied with fervent gratitude. "But indeed, you must not stand outside in this terrible storm to put the tents up, everything is as wet as it can be now."

"So am I as wet as I can be. I couldn't get no saturateder if I stayed out all night. Don't trouble about me, Miss Milner, I'm as right as a trivet. If water was agoin' to kill me, I'd ha' been dead afore this. You just get into the kitchen, there's a bit o' fire there, I see, and I'll bring you some dry blankets out o' your father's tent to wrap around you; half dry ones at any rate. Do go, you ain't doin' a bit o' good here, on'y fixen' to be sick."

Thus urged, Kathie went, and Chips carried in a roll of blankets and rugs, and, kneeling down on the floor, regardless of mud, he proceeded to blow the smoking vaal-bush roots into a blaze. "Now that looks a bit more cheerfuller," he said, as he rose to his feet. "And, if you'll excuse me for advisin' you, Miss Milner, you'll jest have a cup o' hot coffee as soon as you can get it made. There ain't nothing like coffee to my mind for warmin' folks up, its heaps better than any kind o' sperets."

"I am quite of your opinion, and you must stay and have a cup before you trouble to go and put the tents up."

"I ain't agoin' to trouble about it, there ain't nothen' troubles me, and if they lay there an hour longer they'll be that stiff an' heavy with mud and water that it'll be a job for ten men to lift 'em. Did I tell you that your father was over the river."

"No, what did he cross the river for?"

"He went over to Witberg to peg out, an' I suppose the storm come on, and he couldn't get a boat to bring him back. That's the reason he ain't here, I guess."

All the time Chips had been speaking he had been digging a trench to lead off the water which was flowing in an impetuous little stream through the middle of the kitchen

floor, and he now proceeded to cut into lengths the coil of rope he carried; this done, he went out and began to put up the tents with the help of George, who had just appeared on the scene, dripping with water and shivering—to use Chips' simile "like a dog in a wet sack."

The storm had by this time abated considerably, the wind had gone down, and though the rain still fell heavily, the lightning flashes, and thunder peals were less frequent. The western sky was growing every moment brighter, and all at once the sun burst forth from between two black clouds, lighting up the scene with a wild strange splendour, turning the falling rain-drops into a glittering silver veil, tinging with gorgeous colours the flying masses of cloud, and converting into patches of tremulous gold the wind-ruffled surface of the broad lakes which lay in every direction.

"He's doin' his best to make up to us, ain't he," said Chips, as, his task finished, he came into the kitchen and took from Kathie's hand a cup of steaming coffee. "Jest look at them clouds that was so black a little while ago, all yeller, and purple, and pink, lookin' as pretty and harmless as if they hadn't jest been playing the mischief with us. I've often noticed it," he went on in an absent and reflective tone, "how quick the good and pleasant things follers a top o' the bad. A bad time comes, and you're all miserable and upset and downhearted, and feel as if the world ain't worth liven' in, and you go on frettin, and fumin', and all at once, afore you know it, somethin's sure to come along so good that you almost forget the bad. Ain't that so now, Miss Milner?"

"It may be," replied Kathie a little drearily, "but such has not been my experience. I have seldom had a sorrow or a trouble, but it has been the herald of other and worse ones. I was just thinking of Longfellow's lines:—

"'Never stoops the soaring vulture
On his quarry in the desert,
On the sick or wounded bison,
But some other vulture watching
From his high, aerial look-out
Sees the downward plunge and follows;
And a third pursues the second,
Coming from the invisible ether,
First a speck and then a vulture,
Till the air is dark with pinions.
So disasters come not singly,

But as if they watched and waited,
Scanning one another's motions;
When the first descends, the others
Follow, follow, gathering flockwise
Round their victim sick and wounded,
First a shadow then a sorrow
Till the air is dark with anguish.'"

"If that's been your experience, Miss Milner, I'm sorry for you," said Chips, with a very sympathetic expression on his rugged features. "I've knowed it be that way, too; but as a rule I've found the good come pretty close upon the heels of the bad. So it ain't always true that 'disaster come not singly,' though a poet did write it, and a true poet, too. I'm proud of that countryman o' mine, Miss Milner."

"I should think so, indeed; and are you fond of his poetry?"

"Very fond of it. There ain't nothin' I like more than good poetry."

"And do you know my countryman, Mr. Tennyson?" Kathie asked; she liked to draw out this rough, honest-hearted man, to speak of his tastes and opinions, which were so much more refined and intellectual than, looking at his plain, rough exterior, one would have expected.

"Yes, he ain't bad," said Towser, in answer to her question, "though I can't always quite see what he's drivin' at. But I like him. I've read a good deal o' poetry, but I guess I like Longfellow best. I wouldn't mind if I had 'Evangeline' to read over again."

"You may have it to-night if you wish," said Kathie. "We have a copy of Longfellow's poems, and I will lend them to you with pleasure."

"Thanks, it's rale good of you. I should like it first rate, and as I see your father comin' I'll be off. Adonis and Peter'll be comin' after me if I ain't home soon."

Before he went, however, he chopped up a large pile of roots and sticks, and packed them in the oven that they might find them "dry and fit for use in the mornin'."

Good, thoughtful, noble-hearted Chips, whom such people as Mr. Parkins and Mrs. Bain called ignorant and vulgar. Kathie's eyes filled with tears of gratitude, and she watched him in his dripping garments, as, without waiting for the thanks she and her father began to utter, he hurried off homeward down the hill.

"It is impossible to sleep in this place to-night!"

exclaimed Pearl in dismay, when she and Kathie had retired to their tent for the night. "Just look at these wet blankets and muddy pillows. It's a good thing we didn't tell papa what a condition they were in, or he would have brought us all his blankets and gone without any himself."

"Yes. No; we cannot sleep here, Pearl; suppose we go into the kitchen, build a fire, and stay there till morning. We can take a book if you like, and try to forget our surroundings."

So they wrapped themselves up in the driest ulsters and scarves they could find, for the night was intensely cold, and established themselves before the kitchen fire. They read on steadily for several hours, taking the book chapter and chapter about. But by-and-bye Pearl found that her thoughts would keep straying farther and farther from the pages, and at last her head sank on to Kathie's lap and she was asleep. Presently, finding that she had no listener, Kathie laid down the book. For a long time she sat gazing into the fire, seeing, instead of the glowing coals and white ashes, scenes and faces which had passed out of her life for ever, until they grew vague and indistinct, and she followed Pearl into dreamland. And thus, to his astonishment, Mr. Milner found them, when, very early the next morning, he went into the kitchen to make the fire.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VISIT TO THE CITY OF DIAMONDS.

THE next day was bright and hot, and Kathie and Pearl spent all the morning drying their soaked and muddy blankets, and spreading out their almost ruined wardrobe on the grass to dry. Most of their trunks and boxes were standing half full of water, others had been broken by the fall, and they had scarcely a dress, hat, or glove, which was not completely spoiled by mud or water.

"It is too bad," exclaimed Kathie, looking ruefully at the stained and discoloured garments that lay spread around. "And we can so ill afford to lose anything. Look at those velvet dresses; I quite depended on them to carry us through the winter. And those merinos; we have not a single warm dress that is not spoiled!"

"No; nor anything else," replied Pearl, seating herself on

a stone and folding her hands. "Kathie, do you remember Mr. Durwood's telling you that 'these little thunderstorms' were rather pleasant than otherwise?"

"I wish—" began Kathie, then stopped and laughed. "No," she said, "I will not wish it; bad wishes might come home to roost. I will wish instead that Mr. Durwood may learn to speak the truth some day."

"And I will wish that you may get your wish," said Pearl, laughing; "but I doubt it. Look here Kathie, *these* dresses are not spoiled; the sand will brush off them easily when they are dry." And she held up two neat, dark blue cashmere dresses which appeared to have suffered less than the rest of their wardrobe. "And the things in that tin-lined case are all dry except our hats, and they are not hurt. We can easily curl the feathers up again."

"I am very glad. Pearl, I have a plan. Do you think we can contrive to get a presentable dress, hat and pair of gloves out of the wreck?"

"I daresay we can; our white dresses have come out all right, and our best gloves were fortunately in the tin case. But what is your plan?"

"What do you say to a trip to Kimberley?"

"I should like it; but how could we go? If you mean to buy new things we can't; for papa only sent for forty pounds, and it would take all of that and more to repair the damage caused by yesterday's 'pleasant little storm.'"

"I am not thinking of 'repairing damages,' and I never dreamed of asking papa for money; he has none to spare, I know. But Pearl, we must have some warm things for winter, and so must the boys; they have grown out of all their clothes, and they have nothing suitable for a long winter spent out in the open air, as we shall have to spend the one that is coming. I dread it so."

"So do I; but how do you propose to get clothes without money?"

"I don't propose to do it; I only said that I didn't mean to ask papa for money. What do you think of this?—turned into money, I mean?" and as she spoke she drew from a little velvet-lined case she held a necklace of small pearls linked together with frail little chains of gold.

"Oh, your pearl necklace!" exclaimed Pearl. "How pretty it is; and oh! Kathie, how often I have seen you wear it."

"It is a long time since I wore it," replied Kathie,

drawing the frail, gleaming chain through her fingers. "The last time was, I think, at Mrs. Osborne's Christmas Eve party. Heigho! how far off those days seem."

"They *are* far off," said Pearl. "Were these mamma's pearls, Kathie?"

"No, or I should not like to part with them; they were a birthday gift from Uncle Lorrimer; he sent them to me from India."

"Oh! yes, I remember; but how will you sell them? Not here?"

"No; who would buy them? We must try and sell them to a jeweller in Kimberley."

"But how are you to get to Kimberley?"

"I was thinking that we might go with Mrs. Bain; she is going this week or next, and she has so often asked us to go with her."

"I should not like to ask a favour from Mrs. Bain, should you?"

"It would not be much of a favour; merely a seat in her cart, and she has often offered it to us. I shall not mind asking that, Pearl."

"And what will papa say?"

"He will not object to our going, and I am sure he will not mind my selling the pearls, that is, he will not mind their being sold; he may object to *my* selling them. I will ask him first, of course."

"Is it worth much?"

"It is not very valuable, I think; I shall be satisfied if we get thirty pounds."

"Thirty pounds! It must be worth more than that, Kathie, much more."

"Very probably; but of course a jeweller would not give us its real value, perhaps not even thirty pounds; but twenty would be worth more to us than the necklace. Suppose we go and see Mrs. Bain, and ask her if we can drive into town with her. Let us go this afternoon, a walk through this bright, hot sunshine will do us good after our wetting."

Accordingly, having obtained Mr. Milner's permission to go to Kimberley with Mrs. Bain if she should be going, they set off to see her. They found the lady in her garden in a large easy chair, with her plump hands folded idly in her lap. Mrs. Bain was always idle because, as she took care to tell everybody, "she could afford to be so."

"Good-day, Miss Milner, you are quite a stranger," she

exclaimed. "And how are you getting on this stormy weather? Weren't you nearly drowned yesterday?"

"We were 'all but' as the old women say," replied Kathie.

"I thought you would be, I've been pitying you poor digger folks all the week; but I daresay my pity was thrown away. You are used to all kinds of discomforts, I suppose, and are pretty well content."

"We at least try to be resigned to such discomforts as are unavoidable," Kathie answered smiling, as she followed Mrs. Bain into the parlour, but Pearl's eyes flashed ominously at the lady's patronising tone.

"I daresay you do," Mrs. Bain continued, complacently smoothing down the folds of her dress. "Being used to roughing it makes all the difference; now *I* couldn't stand it for a week. How is Lena Bernhardt? I haven't seen her for an age. I suppose she's been hard at work, poor thing?"

"I don't know that she's been more busy than usual, but she has not been very well."

"Humph, I hadn't heard of it. I daresay fancy has something to do with it. Girls nowadays are very apt to fancy themselves invalids. I never had an ache or a pain when I was a girl."

"You were very fortunate," said Pearl, quite unable to keep silence when Lena was attacked. "I know of no one less likely to indulge in idle fancies than Lena."

Mrs. Bain looked at the indignant speaker much as an elephant might be supposed to look at an impertinent fly, and as if she were quite beneath notice and unworthy of a reply; and turning to Kathie she continued:

"I suppose, as you are such a great friend of Miss Bernhardt's, she has told you of her engagement to that young minister—what's his name again? I forget."

"Mr. Van Renen. Oh, yes, she has told us."

"It is a very sad thing I think," she went on, with a shake of her head. "Such an unsuitable match."

"In what way is it unsuitable?" Kathie asked surprised.

"Why the man's a clergyman."

"I know he is; but what of that?"

"Lena Bernhardt is quite unfit to be the wife of a clergyman."

"Why?"

"Why I should think you'd hardly need to ask; but

to be sure it isn't every one who thinks as seriously as I do of the duty of minister's wives. In my opinion they should be neither shallow nor frivolous."

"But surely, Mrs. Bain, you do not think that Lena is either the one or the other?"

"She is both; she cares nothing for the serious duties of life; her mind and thoughts are always given to books and imagination; and the real, earnest, actual duties of life, the duties she was created for, she despises."

Mrs. Bain was growing warm, and so, to tell the truth, was Pearl, only Kathie's warning glance restrained her from speaking her mind in defence of her friend.

"Yes," repeated Mrs. Bain, more emphatically than before, "she despises common everyday tasks."

"It is strange, then, that she performs them so well," said Kathie quietly. "She is a model sister, and her house is always the perfection of scrupulous neatness. I never saw the most trivial task neglected."

"I believe you; nor have I; she doesn't neglect her house nor that solemn, sanctimonious brother of her's. That's not what I'm talking about. It's not that she neglects her work, but that she despises it. She hurries over it that she may have more time to spend with her eyes and her thoughts between the two covers of a book; and she can't talk to you for ten minutes without mentioning some thing or place she's read of, or quoting the poetry of some worthless fellow who lived hundreds of years ago and who was no better than he ought to be; and the hours and hours she spends, getting up early and going to bed late, studying foreign languages, when, if she had two grains of sense, she'd know that a knowledge of Battapin would be more useful to a girl in her position. She thinks more of such things than she does of cooking or sewing, a good deal."

"I never saw anyone who could sew more beautifully, and her cooking is beyond all praise," was Kathie's reply.

"Ah, yes, she *can* do it, but she would rather sit poring over a book. I've no patience with such frivolous waste of time; and that Gabriel is just as bad: goes about with his eyes on the ground and his head in the clouds, and stumbles over a body before he recognises her. But there," she added, with a look which she meant to be arch, but which was only inquisitive, "I suppose it wouldn't be wise or well to run him down to *you*, Miss Milner."

"It is seldom well to run one's friends down in one's hearing," answered Kathie with a calm glance which baffled her curiosity, "and never well, I think, to speak ill of the absent."

Mrs. Bain had the grace to look uncomfortable for a moment, but quickly recovering herself, she said sharply:

"Oh, well, I don't pride myself on being charitable. I speak of people as I find them; if I like them, I say so; and if I don't, I'm not afraid to say that either. This is a free country, thank goodness; everyone has a right to express their opinion, whether it's flattery or whether it is not."

If Kathie had at that moment availed herself of the happy freedom of the country to express her opinion of Mrs. Bain, that lady would certainly not have considered it flattering; but not wishing to be classed in the category of those who speak all their mind, she wisely kept silence.

Presently, recovering her self-complacency, Mrs. Bain went on to other and safer subjects, but all the time seasoning her talk with spiteful criticisms and unpleasant hints and inuendoes which acted on Kathie's nerves like a rasp. It was impossible to be with Mrs. Bain for long without feeling one's temper suffering from the contact. Of all unpleasant people, those who have grown hard and unsympathetic through over-much prosperity, are, I think, the most unpleasant and the most irritating.

"Why, here come Alf Parkins and that Annie Long," she cried presently, jumping up and going to the window, "I wonder if Alf is thinking of that girl. I wouldn't have him marry her for anything. I've no opinion of the Longs—a thriftless, shiftless set they are and always will be, and not a sixpence to bless themselves with. Alf will be a fool if he has anything to do with them. He's my nephew or I shouldn't care who he married; but I never can bear to have those belonging to me making fools of themselves. Good afternoon, Alfred. Good day; Annie, when did you get back from Kimberly?"

These last sentences were spoken on the doorstep.

"We came back yesterday in young Smith's waggon," said the young lady in answer to the question.

"And did you enjoy your trip? But come in; come in, Alf. I've other visitors in the parlour." And she hurried inside, followed by her nephew and the young lady she hoped would not be her niece.

Mr. Parkins' look of gratification upon perceiving who the visitors were was unmistakable, and he mentally congratulated himself upon having "touched up" his toilet a little more than usual before coming out. It was not often he met the Miss Milners, and when he did, he never failed to try and deepen the good impression which he flattered himself he had made upon them at their first meeting.

Kathie shook hands cordially enough, and replied with frank politeness to his solicitous enquiries as to her health, that of her father, and the little boy. But Pearl gave him the tips of her fingers in dignified silence: she detested Mr. Parkins, and took no pains to hide her feelings.

"Charming weather we are having, are we not?" he began, in the drawling somewhat indistinct tone which he always, assumed when in company, and which he had first heard and admired in a young Kimberley exquisite, and sedulously cultivated ever since. "But my aunt and I are both forgetting that you and Miss Long have not the mutual honour to be acquainted. Miss Long, Miss Milner, Miss Pearl Milner."

Miss Long bowed stiffly, and sat down awkwardly on the extreme edge of the chair Mrs. Bain placed for her, and began industriously plaiting the frills of her dress with her finger and thumb. She was afflicted with bashfulness, poor girl, and upon finding herself in unexpected company always took refuge behind her flounces or the hem of her apron.

"Well, Annie," began Mrs. Bain, her sharp critical grey eyes running all over the girl from the crown of her head to the toe of her dusty shoe, "you haven't told me how you enjoyed yourself in town."

"Oh, I enjoyed myself a good deal; I liked Kimberley very much."

"Where did you buy your hat?"

"At B. and Co's."

"Humph! *I* never buy anything there. They make you pay a lot for everything, and they'll palm you off with an inferior article if they can."

"I only gave fifteen shillings for it," said Annie apologetically.

"Well that wasn't much to lay out," her questioner admitted graciously; "but I daresay you'll find that the straw won't wear well. Your mother's teeth been troubling her lately?"

"No; she got something to cure her the other day," replied Annie; then, evidently thinking that her hostess had monopolised her long enough, she turned to the sofa where Mr. Parkins sat in an attitude of studied elegance, and addressed to him the important question, "Mr. Parkins, did you ever have a tooth drawn?"

"Never, that I remember," replied the young gentleman shortly, so disgusted with the question that he forgot to maintain the drawl.

Poor Annie felt snubbed, and she showed it; her round cheeks grew painfully crimson, and she crumpled up her frills with redoubled diligence.

Mr. Parkins felt a momentary compunction, for, only half an hour before, he had been thinking that Miss Long was not "half a bad little thing," but he really could not trouble himself about her just now.

It was astonishing to see how awkward and gawky she appeared the moment she entered the room where Miss Milner was. How could he have come near admiring anything so second rate. No, he would not be so foolish as to throw himself away on Annie Long; he must do better; he owed it to his family to do better; he owed it to the education he had received at a boarding school, and to the elegance and good looks which he undoubtedly possessed. Having thus decided, he all but turned his back upon Miss Long, and remarked to Kathie that the river looked very pretty to-day.

Kathie replied that it did.

"But it looks prettier by moonlight, don't you think?"

Kathie said that she admired it at all times.

"Yes, of course, but at night, when lighted only by the pale moonbeams, it is more—more—I mean that it appeals more strongly to the heart and mind, and—and—all that kind of thing."

Miss Long looked her admiration of this refined sentiment so elegantly expressed, and began to feel quite ashamed of her dental remark. How coarse and prosaic he must have thought her; and, after casting about in her mind for a suitable speech, which should at once remove all unpleasant impressions, and prove to Mr. Parkins that he was not the only one whose thoughts were capable of soaring above the region of the commonplace, she said gently:

"Are you fond of flowers, Miss Milner? I love them dearly."

"I am very fond of them," replied Kathie, with a bright interested smile which quite won the poor bashful girl's heart. "Have you many?"

"No, only a few; we had lots when we lived on the farm; but the wind dries them up so here. What flowers do you like best?"

"It is hard to say, when there are so many beautiful ones. I like roses and carnations very much, but then I think I like mignonette and heliotrope almost as well, and I am very fond of Cape jessamine."

"So am I, but I like white dahlias best of all. Which do you like best, Mr. Parkins?"

"Well, like Miss Milner, I find it very hard to say when there is so much and such different kinds of beauty to choose from; but I am inclined to think that the simplest flowers are the most charming. I find that the violet or the daisy 'oft bears thoughts that lie too deep for tears,' and—and all that kind of thing."

"That's just how I feel when I look at white dahlias," said Annie. "They make me think of all kinds of things. And I like—admire orange-blossoms awfully."

"Do you really? What an admission! I fancy most young ladies do," murmured Mr. Parkins.

"Oh! for shame, Mr. Parkins! I never thought—I only mean that I like them because they are so sweet and fragrant, and look so beautiful nestling amongst their glossy leaves, and giving such a promise of golden fruit to come."

This last sentence was so poetical and so well worded that Miss Long felt quite triumphant. Surely no one could think her prosaic after that.

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Bain. "There's some sense in talking of fruit, but I never can understand people's going into raptures over flowers—things that are really of no use."

"Of no use, aunt! Why they have a noble mission. You forget their power to refine and elevate and—all that kind of thing."

"Fiddlesticks. They're all very well in their way, of course; I'm sure I don't grudge them the room they take up in the world. But when it comes to talking of their being of use, and having a mission, and all that sort of rubbish, it disgusts me."

"Why, Mrs. Bain!" exclaimed Annie, "you are just like the man by the river's brim, who thought a primrose was yellow and nothing else."

This was almost too much for Pearl's risible nerves, and Kathie's eyes laughed, but she managed to keep her lips in order. But Mr. Parkins looked preternaturally grave. There was something wrong about that quotation, he knew; but what it was he really could not remember, and, having decided to "look it up" when he went home, he dismissed it from his mind and remarked to Pearl that he "supposed she was very fond of poetry." Pearl, on whose nerves the whole conversation, especially Mr. Parkins' share of it, jarred unpleasantly, asked him rather coldly, why he supposed so.

Mr. Parkins looked somewhat taken aback.

"Why? Well most young ladies do, do they not? I always thought so. It seems natural that what is beautiful should be—a—admire what is beautiful, and what is fair is attracted to what is fair by a natural—a—a—power."

"Right you are," croaked a hoarse voice close beside him, causing him to start and look around.

They all laughed when they discovered that the speaker who was so cordially endorsing what Mr. Parkins said, was no other than Mrs. Bain's vicious, sulky parrot.

"Polly agrees with you, at all events," said Pearl.

"Ugly creature!" exclaimed Polly's mistress, throwing a rug over the cage. "I detest the noisy thing. If it hadn't been Mr. Bain's pet, I'd have given it away long ago; but somehow my feelings always come in the way of my ridding myself of the old thing. I'm not made of flint, like some people, I know. There's old Mrs. Dumbleton, left a widow only a few weeks ago, has already given away all the old fellow's books."

"Books," repeated Mr. Parkins in languid surprise. "I didn't know old Dumbleton was at all fond of—at all intellectual."

"Yes, he had some really good ones. I went over last week to see if she would sell them to me, but the heartless old thing had already given them away."

"Why, aunt, I thought you were dead off books," said he, smiling in a superior way and glancing at Kathie, on whom, however, both smile and glance were lost; for at that moment she was looking out of the window at a slowly approaching wagon which looked very much like Mrs. Hout's."

"Well, you thought right," replied Mrs. Bain. "I am 'dead off' the rubbish you mean by books. The trash you fill your head with is only fit to light the fire. What I wanted out of old Dumbleton's lot was some good homeopathic books he had, though, to be sure, they didn't save him; in fact, they say that the medicines of different kinds that he took helped to kill him, for first he dosed himself for this complaint, and then for that, and at last he got hold of some wonderful patent mixture warranted to cure every ill that is, from a pain in the little finger to a bad headache, or even a fit of the blues; but he died all the same."

"Now really, aunt," began her nephew, passing over Mr. Dumbleton's ailments, real and imaginary, his doses, orthodox and patent, and his final decease as trifles unworthy of notice, and seizing upon that part of her speech which related to himself and whereby he might bring the conversation round to a more intellectual channel. "Now really, it is too bad of you to call—a—stigmatize the books I read as 'trash.' I confess to a partiality for poetry, romance-kind of thing; but the idea of anyone's calling that 'trash!' Miss Milner, I appeal to you, won't you support the cause of—a—take up the cudgels in defence of literature?"

"Oh, Miss Milner's of my opinion, that most poetry is the veriest trash."

Kathie thus appealed to could scarcely conceal her amusement.

"I will agree with you so far, that a great deal of what is called poetry is utter nonsense," she said.

"But real poetry, welling up from the soul, bursting fresh from the heart kind of thing; surely you are susceptible to —a—affected by it?"

"Yes, I appreciate real poetry," she said quietly. Then, seeing that he still waited—she was not wielding the cudgels vigorously enough to please him, she added, "Poetry is, I think, the best and highest of all music, and certainly it is the most universal, for it is within the reach of all and can be enjoyed where other music is unattainable."

"Here is Mrs. Hout!" exclaimed Pearl in pleasant tones, lifting her head which had been bent over Polly's cage since the beginning of Mr. Parkins' last speech.

"Mrs. Hout came in in her usual brisk, smiling way, seeming to bring with her a pure, fresh breath from the world of kindness and good sense into the room, the air of which seemed to Pearl to have grown faint and heavy with

the languid artificiality of Mr. Parkins and the sharp uncharitableness of his aunt. Everyone welcomed her warmly but Mr. Parkins, who found "the old lady rather slow," and "not at all his style."

"I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Hout," began Mrs. Bain. "I hope you've brought some fresh butter in with you."

"I have," she replied; "but not to sell in Hebron."

"What are you going to do with it then?"

"I am going to take it in to Kimberley."

"To Kimberley? When are you going? Not to-night?"

"No, early in the morning."

Kathie and Pearl looked at each other. How nice it would be if they could go to Kimberley with Mrs. Hout instead of Mrs. Bain.

"So you brought no butter with you," said Mrs. Bain discontentedly.

"None to sell; but I've not forgotten you and Lena Bernhardt; I brought some for you. You and your sister had better come with me, Miss Milner," she added, turning to Kathie. "You haven't seen our big town yet, have you?"

"We came through on our way from Cape Town, but we scarcely saw it; we were there only a few hours. Pearl and I will go with you to-morrow with pleasure, Mrs. Hout, if you will take us; we are wishing very much to go."

"Are you? That's right. I didn't think you would go when I asked you, but I'll be very glad to have you. I should tell you, though, that I am only going to stay three days this time."

"That will be quite long enough for all the business we have to do. Thank you very much, Mrs. Hout."

"No, don't thank me; I'll be very glad to have you; I am all alone with the leader and driver. Can you be ready to start by five o'clock?"

"Oh, yes! At any time you wish."

"Then you will find my wagon inspanned and ready to start by five to-morrow morning. I am outspanned now at Lena's. I would go up for you, but it's rather heavy going up the kopje."

"Oh, no! Do not come, we will walk down to Lena's."

And so it was arranged, much to Kathie's and Pearl's satisfaction, and they hurried home to make their preparations for the early journey.

Such preparations as Kathie had never before had to make for a journey. They had their damp discoloured feathers to wash and curl, the red sand to brush out of their only presentable dresses, gloves to mend, and shoes to polish.

"Shall we take our white frocks with us?" asked Pearl, when at last everything was done.

"I don't think so; we shall not want them, shall we?"

"If we meet Ambie he is sure to make us go to see his sister; we shall want them then."

"Not unless we went in the evening; but never mind, put them in."

It was exactly five o'clock the next morning, and Mrs. Hout's leader was tying his last 'riem,' when Kathie and Pearl appeared equipped for their journey, and followed by George carrying their trunk.

They outspanned for dinner and to rest the oxen at the Salt-pan, half-way between Hebron and Kimberley; and Kathie was surprised to find that the "pan" of which she had so often heard was nothing more nor less than a large vley with a broad, sandy beach, on which the salt was heaped in white pyramids.

They had a very pleasant walk after dinner among the beautiful vaal-bushes, mimosas, and fantastically-piled rocks of the kopje, at the foot of which they were outspanned; and early in the afternoon they started on again and rattled into Kimberley just as all the clocks were striking the half-hour after ten. They drew up and outspanned under one of the great thorn-trees that grow between Kimberley and Beaconsfield, and early the next morning drove on to the market—another new experience for Kathie and Pearl.

After Mrs. Hout had sold all her butter, honey, biltong and preserves, she drove to her sister's house. This lady often visited her sister's farm, and Kathie and Pearl had frequently met her at Lena's, and were sure of a cordial welcome at her house. They were just alighting from the wagon at her door when a horseman rode past. It was Ambie Hildyard, and his surprise was almost equal to his pleasure when he recognised them.

With whom had they come? Why had they come? How long were they going to stay? A hundred other questions he asked them almost in a breath, adding in conclusion, "You must come and stay with us. Florrie is not at home, but she will be back by ten o'clock, and she

and I will come for you. You must come and stay with us, and if you have any shopping to do, Florrie will take you about and show you the best places to buy things; but—Oh, I forgot!" he added solemnly, his face clouding, "she is going away again to-morrow morning, but you will come and stay with us until then, will you? Florrie will never forgive you if you do not."

They willingly consented, glad that an opportunity of making the acquaintance of Ambie's sister had arrived, and Ambie rode off, radiant. But though they were ready and waiting at ten o'clock, he and his sister did not come.

"They sat in Mrs. Van Ryn's little parlour with their hats and gloves on waiting nearly all the morning, growing a little surprised as the hours passed on and the carriage did not appear. It was late in the afternoon when at last it drew up before the door, and Ambie came in alone, with a rather hesitating and incoherent apology for his sister's non-appearance and for the delay.

Kathie had expected to see in Mrs. De Beer's house something of the graceful, airy elegance of Ingleside, but the great drawing-room into which Ambie led them, was furnished on a scale of magnificence which quite threw her girlhood's home into the shade. It was long and lofty, the walls hung with pictures in splendid frames; the floor was of black, polished wood, bright and slippery as glass, and covered in the middle by a thick carpet of velvet pile. Priceless vases stood on the mantelshelf, and costly trifles were scattered about everywhere. The room was vacant; but an open book, a lace handkerchief, and a superb ostrich-feather fan hinted at its recent occupation by its mistress.

Ambie seated his visitors on a low, velvet couch, drew back the heavy curtains which made the room almost dark, and was about to throw up the sash, but paused laughingly, with his hand upon it.

"I suppose I must not open it," he said. "The dreaded Kimberley dust might come in. I expected to find Florrie here, I will go and look for her."

He went away and returned in a few minutes, accompanied by a lady so like himself in features, that her unlikeness of manner and expression was all the more striking. She was tall and graceful, with a complexion of alabaster and the air of a grand duchess, and so richly and daintily dressed that Kathie felt shabby and clumsy all at once; and when the

lady held out her ringed and snowy hand, Kathie remembered, with a slight feeling of shame, how brown and roughened her own were, a feeling of which she felt ashamed the next moment.

While Mrs. De Beer was uttering her polite, languid words of greeting, she was taking in every detail of her young visitors' appearance, and an odd look of mingled satisfaction and amazement passed over her handsome, well-bred features; a look which Kathie saw, but did not understand, and which made her feel very uncomfortable.

An expression of disappointment was making itself visible on Ambie's ingenuous countenance, as his sister talked in her low, polished tones, and slowly fanned herself the while. Poor, simple-hearted Ambie! He had actually imagined that his elegant, haughty sister would welcome with kindly cordiality, a girl in a shabby frock and unstylish hat, merely because he loved her. If he had but known it, Kathie Milner's name had sounded unpleasantly in Mrs. De Beer's ears for some months past. She had discovered—no difficult task—that Kathie had won wholly and completely her brother's heart, and the discovery had caused her the most intense annoyance. A girl without a penny! A diamond digger's daughter! It was more than Mrs. De Beer could calmly contemplate. Ambie, who was so rich and handsome, who was so popular, and whom it was her pet hobby to marry to Miss Dora Eberstein, the only daughter and heiress of one of the wealthiest men in the country! Of course Miss Milner belonged to a really good, old English family, which Dora certainly did not; but that was nothing. They were not in England now, and in South Africa the Milners were nobodies. She had been a little curious to see Kathie, and the look of satisfaction was caused by the fact that she was by no means so handsome as, from Ambie's description, she had expected to find her. Moreover she was shabby and unfashionable. She was not such a formidable rival for Dora after all. How Ambie could even imagine himself in love with a girl who wore a dress like that, Mrs. De Beer could not conceive. Truly men were incomprehensible creatures.

Ambie stood by listening to the conversation, trying to make it take a livelier and less formal tone; but his sister, steadily, though without any seeming effort, thwarted him and talked away, low and quietly, in the tone which Pearl said afterwards was just like ice cream—so cold and sweet.

"Will Mr. De Beer be home to dinner, Ambie, do you know, or will he dine at his club?" she asked at length, glancing at her jewelled watch.

"He is coming home, Florrie; I told him that two very old and dear friends of father's and Aunt Hester's would be here to-night," he replied, smiling at Kathie.

His sister did not smile, but trifled with the clasp of her diamond bracelet for a few minutes in silence, then rose slowly, saying:

"He must be here then, for it is time to dress, and to his many virtues Mr. De Beer adds that of rigid punctuality. Ring the bell, Ambie, please."

A rather slight, picturesquely-dressed, young Hindoo girl appeared in answer to the ring, and Mrs. De Beer directed her to show the young ladies to the room that had been prepared for them. She followed them to the door of the room, then paused, saying:

"I hope you will find everything here that you require; ring if you do not. Shall I send my maid to attend you? I can dispense with her services."

"No thank you," replied Kathie, quietly; "my sister and I have been long accustomed to wait upon ourselves." The idea of requiring the services of a maid to take off one dress and put on another seemed absurd. How strange that it had not always seemed so.

"Just as you please," said Mrs. De Beer, languidly, as she swept away.

"Who would think that she was Ambie's sister, and dear Mr. Hildyard's daughter?" exclaimed Pearl, when she and Kathie were alone together in their room, the magnificence of which almost awed them after their eight months' residence in dusty tents.

"She is not in the least like what I expected," said Kathie, with a little sigh of disappointment.

"Do you think she wants us here, Kathie?"

"No!"

"Why did she let Ambie bring us, then?"

"Because she could hardly help herself when he had already invited us."

"Let us go back to Mrs. Van Ryn's, after dinner."

"Oh, we could not, Pearl, without appearing very rude, and Ambie would be very much hurt."

"I don't see that it would be rude, and Ambie had no

business to ask us here if he thought we should be unwelcome."

"Very probably he did not think so."

"He ought to have known before he asked us. I knew, the instant Mrs. De Beer came into the room, that she wished us at the Antipodes. I don't know how it is that men never can see anything. I wish to goodness we had not come."

"We could hardly have refused, for we could not know that Mrs. De Beer would not receive us as cordially as, had the circumstances been reversed, we should have welcomed her."

"I can hardly believe that she is Ambie's sister. Why, if we had come altogether uninvited she could not be more coldly polite. Her air of haughty superiority is enough to drive one wild."

"Why, Pearl," said Kathie, smiling, "anyone who is acquainted with Mrs. Bain ought to be used to being patronised and treated to superior airs."

"That's quite a different thing; the bad manners of an ignorant, vulgar woman like Mrs. Bain are not worth noticing. She does not know any better; but Mrs. De Beer does know better, and her frigid politeness is almost a studied insult."

"Well, we must endure it till to-morrow afternoon, and then we can go back to Mrs. Hout. We shall appreciate her warm, kind manner all the more after this dry atmosphere. Come, let us dress, I should not like to be late for dinner."

Kathie assisted Pearl to dress in her pretty white muslin, and fastened at her throat and on her sleeves the bows of violet velvet which were so becoming to her delicate complexion and pale gold hair. And Pearl arranged Kathie's hair for her with the deftness of a practised lady's maid, and the taste of an artist.

"I never did it better," she exclaimed, stepping back to survey her handiwork. "Mrs. De Beer's own coiffure is not more magnificent, and that white dress suits you to perfection. I am glad we brought them; do you know that not one crease or sand stain in those poor old blue frocks escaped Mrs. De Beer's notice. No, don't put any bows on, it looks better without, more distinguished. Look in the glass, it's an age since you saw yourself in anything approaching evening-dress."

Kathie glanced at the mirror and was surprised and—shall I confess it?—a little pleased at the change which the alteration in her toilette had wrought. She had been so long accustomed to see herself in the dark blue or brown serge dresses and coarse holland aprons, which were the only garments suitable for wear in the dusty tents of Hebron, that she could scarcely believe that the fair, dainty image looking back at her from the glass was her own reflection.

"Isn't it marvellous what a difference dress makes?" said Pearl, surveying her with proud satisfaction. "You look a different being, and I have an idea that someone won't be very pleased when she sees that the little partridge has suddenly been transformed into a stately white swan. Where are your pearls, Kathie? Wear them for the last time."

"No, I have worn them for the last time; I won't wear them again, not in their present form that is; I hope to wear some of them in the shape of a warm, winter dress." But Pearl insisted, and taking the necklace from its case, she clasped it round Kathie's neck.

"Do wear them, Kathie," she entreated. "They give you just the finishing touch you need; they make you look like your old self."

"But I am not my old self, why should I try to look like her?"

A gentle tap at the door, just then, prevented the expostulation Pearl was beginning to utter. Kathie opened the door, and the pleasant-faced Hindoo girl they had seen before, stood without, holding a salver, on which lay a beautiful little bouquet of white roses and violets.

"Mr. Hildyard told me to bring you these," she said, handing them to Kathie with a look of admiration.

"Ambie is a dear fellow!" exclaimed Pearl enthusiastically, when the door was closed again. "Sit down, Kathie, and let me fasten some of these buds in your hair."

"No, no, Pearl," replied Kathie, hastily. "I do not want to wear them, I shall feel too much dressed."

"Too much dressed," repeated Pearl scornfully. "In a simple white frock! Have you forgotten how you used to dress?"

"No, but——"

"But me no buts. I have determined to make you look irresistibly lovely, and I have almost succeeded; it only wants the rosebuds to complete the work."

So laughingly, and half against her will, Kathie sat down and submitted to have the roses fastened in her hair; then she placed a knot of violets in Pearl's crinkled, yellow tresses.

"We are not so ugly and sunburnt yet, Kathie, but we can make up pretty tolerably when we try," said Pearl with a comical uplifting of her eyebrows as she surveyed herself in the great cheval glass. "And now I suppose we *must* go into the drawing-room. I wish we were safely back with Mrs. Hout again, I feel stifled here."

Mrs. De Beer was alone in the drawing-room when they entered. She looked up at them a little curiously, and though she rarely permitted her thoughts to find expression in her face, she could not altogether conceal her annoyance and surprise at the transformation Pearl had spoken of. Was that graceful, aristocratic-looking girl, so tastefully dressed, so regally crowned with her own golden hair, the pale, shabby, tired-looking girl she had left an hour ago. With all her money, Dora Eberstein could never look like that; and the knowledge sent the mercury of Mrs. De Beer's manner down several degrees below freezing point.

Presently, Ambie and his brother-in-law came in together. Mr. De Beer was a tall, dark, rather elderly man, slow and quiet, with nothing of his wife's grace and refinement about him. He greeted Kathie and Pearl, however, with far more cordiality than she had. He was a business man, and absorbed in the great work of making money. He was not a man of extravagant tastes; his wife spent more money in a week than he did in a month. He liked making money better than he liked spending it. He liked to feel himself in the whirl of business speculations; he lived for his work, and though he had more thousands than most men have sovereigns he never dreamed of relaxing his efforts. The world outside of the Stock Exchange and his house of business had few attractions for him. Not that Mr. De Beer was sordid or money-loving in the common acceptation of the terms, for he certainly was not so; he liked to see his wife spend money with a lavish hand, he liked his house to be magnificently furnished, and his servants to be many and well paid. He gave liberally to different societies whenever they appealed to him. But he never thought of giving unless he was appealed to. It never struck him that the boy who stood in a corner of the street in torn boots and ragged coat would be the better for a few of the sovereigns

that jingled in his pocket, or that the woman who was shivering in a thin cotton gown, with two or three hungry children clinging to her skirts, was an appeal to be responded to. If the thought had occurred to him, he would not have passed on without giving; but somehow it never did occur to him. He was a man slow of thought and action, without a particle of imagination, a man to whom a "a primrose by a river's brim, a primrose was and nothing more."

"There was not much in him," Pearl said afterwards in her free, brusque way. "But he was too good to have such a heartless icicle for a wife."

Dinner was a very long and very ceremonious meal. Mr. De Beer was polite and attentive to his young guests, but he was not much of a conversationalist, and talked little; Mrs. De Beer only spoke when she was obliged, and then in the "ice-cream" tone. Ambie did his best to make up for his brother-in-law's taciturnity and his sister's want of cordiality; he talked and laughed, told stories and anecdotes, until his stock of both was exhausted. He was bitterly disappointed by his sister's cold reception of the two girls. He had hoped that Florrie and his incomparable Kathie would be friends. What possessed Florrie to be so rude he could not imagine. Surely she was not so snobbish as to treat them coldly, merely because they were poor! No, he did not believe she was so vulgar. His stately sister often puzzled him, but she puzzled him to-night more than ever before.

"You are not going out this evening, are you, Florence?" asked Mr. De Beer as they rose from the table, glancing at his wife's long-trained, satin gown and the wide diamond collar she wore.

"No," she replied rather doubtfully. "I did intend putting in an appearance at Mrs. Eberstein's, but I have changed my mind," with a glance towards Kathie which could not be mistaken.

Kathie begged that Mrs. De Beer would not allow their presence to keep her at home.

"Well, if you really will not think me rude, I will go," said she. "I promised Mrs. Eberstein that I would not fail her, and I expect to meet several old Cape Town friends there; I should not like to miss them."

"Pray do not," said Kathie. "I should be very sorry if you did. Pray do not remain at home on our account."

Mr. De Beer, who seldom spent his evenings in the

drawing-room whether his wife had company or not, had by this time gone to his smoking-room, and was already plunged in some abstruse monetary calculations, oblivious of everything else.

"I will go then," said Mrs. De Beer, after a few minutes' consideration. "I shall not stay late, but I do not like to disappoint Mrs. Eberstein altogether. You will escort me, Ambie, of course?"

"You will have to excuse me," replied Ambie, sinking into a low seat beside Kathie, and speaking more coldly than he had ever in his life before spoken to his petted sister.

"But you promised Mrs. Eberstein, and she will expect you, and Dora will look for you, too."

"She will look in vain then," he answered lazily from the depths of his cushions, "for I do not intend to go."

"But, Ambie, surely you do not mean me to go alone into those crowded rooms?"

"If you want an escort, take Gilbert. What's the good of having a husband if you never make use of him?"

He spoke lightly, but his sister saw that he was seriously annoyed, and she said no more, but left the room with her handsome head held very high.

"Pray do not let us deprive your sister of your escort, Ambie," said Kathie earnestly, when the door had closed behind Mrs. De Beer's satin train. "Do go."

"You must have a very poor opinion of me," he said, hotly, "if you imagine I am capable of going off to a ball and leaving you and Pearl here alone to your own resources."

"I beg your pardon, but Pearl and I will amuse ourselves very well. Please do not deprive your sister of your company and yourself of a pleasant evening in society, for the sake of entertaining us."

"No society in the world can ever be so pleasant to me as yours, Kathie, and you know it," he answered, with such vexed reproachfulness that she said no more.

Presently they heard Mrs. De Beer come down the long passage, and a few minutes later the carriage bore her away to the scene of gaiety.

"Now," said Ambie, when the sound of the wheels had died away and mingled with the other sounds of the street, "let us forget Mrs. Eberstein and Florrie's intolerable rudeness, I can call it nothing else, and amuse ourselves. I

would ask you to sing, Kathie, some of our old Cape Town favourites, but I see by your face that you would refuse."

"Yes, I do not think I could sing to-night."

"Will you agree to something I am going to propose—something I am sure you will enjoy? Let me get a carriage and show you Kimberley by gas—no, electric light."

Kathie hesitated, but Pearl's longing expression decided her and she consented.

"Go and get ready then," said Ambie delightedly, his good humour quite restored, "and I will get a carriage. I shall not be away ten minutes."

In less than ten minutes he had returned, and in ten more they were driving through the busy streets, lit up with almost more than noon-day brightness by the electric light.

The great, shabby, lively City of Diamonds looked far more attractive at night than it had done in the morning. The brilliantly-lighted streets were filled with carriages, cabs, and vehicles of every description, from the great heavily laden "kurveyors" wagon, with its long span of sixteen or eighteen oxen, to the dainty phaeton or victoria which might have come an hour before from Hyde Park or the Paris boulevards. Equestrians were there, too, in goodly numbers, and the narrow side walks were thronged with foot passengers. There were people of "every tribe and nation," and almost every shade and colour; elegant ladies, rough miners, shabbily dressed urbane-mannered Jews, whose names were great on "Change," farmers in broad felt hats and carrying formidable-looking "sjamboks," spruce clerks, ugly yellow Hottentots, Kafirs, Zulus, Arab merchants in their cleanly muslin skirts and gay embroidered vests, lithe, keen-eyed Hindoos carrying trays of fruit, or parcels of delicate embroidery; while sellers of fruit, sellers of sweetmeats, sellers of cakes, sellers of canaries, made the streets noisy with their cries in many different languages. It was a lively, busy and picturesque scene, unlike anything in England, unlike Cape Town even, and oh! how unlike Hebron. Pearl and Kathie gazed on it with interested eyes. After months of loneliness and seclusion at the river diggings the noise, the life, the hurrying to and fro of the busy crowd almost bewildered them. Ambie ordered the coachman to go slowly that they might see all that was to be seen, and they drove past the great lighted shop windows, where silks and satins, ribbons and laces, and marvels of millinery were displayed to view; and then past

rows of fruit and artistically-arranged flower stores, and past jewellers' windows dazzling with their blaze of diamonds. These last sent Kathie's thoughts back to the dreary huts at Hebron and the hot, dusty kopjes where the poor disheartened diggers toiled.

They drove through several streets full of life, noise, and brilliancy, then turned into a somewhat quieter one where Ambie signed to the coachman to draw up before a large, lighted building, from the interior of which came strains of music.

"There is a sacred concert here to-night," explained Ambie. "You will come in, won't you, Kathie? Don't say no," he added, pleadingly, "I am sure you will enjoy it; they never give us anything but really good music here. Do come! Persuade her Pearl."

Pearl's face was persuasion enough, and unwilling to disappoint her, or to pain Ambie by refusing, she consented, and giving orders to the coachman to return in an hour, Ambie led the way into the concert hall. It was tolerably full, but they found seats, nevertheless, where they could obtain a good view of the performers. The music, as Ambie had promised, was very good indeed, and they enjoyed it thoroughly—Pearl especially, who sat drinking in the sweet sounds with rapture. Never since she had left Cape Town had she enjoyed such a musical feast.

If the two girls had not been so absorbed in the music they could not have failed to observe the strange behaviour of a gentleman who was seated near the door. From the moment they entered the room his eyes had been fastened upon them, at first with earnest scrutiny, and afterwards with something like fear.

"It is, it must be," he muttered to himself, "but surely not; what could they be doing in Kimberley?"

After a few minutes he rose and moved to a seat nearer to them, and fixed his dark eyes upon Kathie's unconscious face; then he took from his pocket a small but powerful lorgnette and raised it to his eyes perfectly indifferent to the curious glances which more than one cast at him. "It is," he said, laying down the glass and pushing back the heavy, dark hair from off his brow as if its weight oppressed him. "I am not mistaken. Are they in exile, too—shamed, disgraced, expatriated through my sin? Have I that on my conscience also? Heavens! what an unhappy, guilty wretch I am!"

When they left the concert-hall he followed them out. "I wonder where they live," he said to himself. "And who is that young fellow with them? It is strange if they are living here that I have never met them before."

When they stepped into the carriage he looked around for a cab with the intention of following them; but there was not an unengaged vehicle of the kind in sight.

"Who is that young gentleman?" he asked of a policeman who stood near.

"Which one?"

"The one who has just driven away with the two young ladies in white. You saw them; you were looking at them," he answered, speaking impatiently in his eagerness and anxiety.

"Oh, that one! Tall, good-looking; fair young man?"

"Yes; do you know his name?"

"Rather, he's young Mr. Ambrose Hildyard."

"Ambrose Hildyard; of the firm of Hildyard and De Beer?"

"The same."

"And do you happen to know who the ladies are?"

"No," replied the man, giving his persistent questioner an inquisitive stare. "Never saw them before. Pretty, ain't they?"

The gentleman made no answer, and presently walked away with bent head and somewhat weary steps.

"Ambrose Hildyard," he replied, "I can find out where *he* lives easily enough. But what would be the use; I can benefit them in no way. Why should I try to find out? Better not; better not."

Meanwhile the carriage containing the objects of his curiosity drove once more through the streets—quieter now than they had been an hour before.

It was very late when they reached Mrs. De Beer's house, and she had not yet returned. Ambie made Pearl sing for him; and, as her sweet, uncommon voice rose and penetrated to Mr. De Beer's smoking room, he came out and joined the little group around the piano, and actually asked Pearl to sing a few favourites of his own. He thanked her cordially when she had finished, saying: "I like simple music best, and the old songs one so seldom hears nowadays. Mrs. De Beer will not sing them; she prefers operatic or severely classical music, for which I have no taste."

Alas for Mr. De Beer! He had no taste for many of the things his wife loved and lived for.

Kathie was up early the next morning. She was standing, with one little corner of the window-curtain drawn aside, looking out into the street, and watching with dreamy interest the string of carts and wagons with their loads going to market, when she caught sight of Ambie walking about among the tamarisks and oleanders in front of the house.

He was alone: she would have no opportunity at breakfast, and afterwards he would go away to business. Now, if ever, was the time to ask him where she should best dispose of her necklace, and, without waiting to ask herself what Mrs. De Beer would say if she saw her and her young brother engaged in earnest conversation among the roses so early in the morning, she put on her hat, and opening the door softly went out with her necklace in her hand.

Ambie looked up at her approach and smiled, well pleased to see her. Kathie wasted no time beating about the bush, but plunged at once into business.

"Ambie," she began, holding up the pale, shining beads. "What do you think this is worth?"

"What is it worth?" he repeated rather wonderingly, taking the necklace from her hand. "Are these the pearls you wore lost night?"

"Yes, it is a necklace my uncle sent me from India years ago. I want to sell it."

"To sell it," he repeated again, with such a look of pity and regret coming into his kind eyes, that Kathie hastened to add brightly—

"Yes, I have no use for such things now, you know. I know that bringing jewels to Kimberley is very like taking coals to Newcastle, but I thought you might be able to tell me where I could sell it."

"Will you trust me to sell it for you?"

"Oh! Ambie, will you?" she exclaimed, in accents of relief. "I should be so glad, that is, if you will not mind."

"Why should I mind? I think I may be able to dispose of it to better advantage than you could. How much are you willing to take for them?"

"I should like thirty pounds, but I would gladly take twenty for them."

"Thirty pounds. I think I can do better for you than

that. I will bring you the money when I come home to luncheon."

"You are very good;" said Kathie. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Shall I tell you?"

"If you please."

"By intrusting to me any business of the kind you may have in the future."

"I will do so very gladly if you will undertake it. You cannot think how I have been dreading an interview with some keen-eyed, close-fisted jeweller who would very probably have imposed upon my youth and ignorance and given me about a fifth of the value of my pearls."

When Ambie came home to lunch he handed Kathie a roll of bank notes to the amount of fifty pounds.

"Oh, Ambie! Fifty pounds," she exclaimed, scarcely believing her own eyes. "I did not expect half so much. Who did you sell them to?"

He hesitated for half a minute, and then answered:

"To an old friend of mine who happened to be in our office. Oh, I had no trouble at all in disposing of them."

Poor Kathie would have been dismayed and horrified if she had known that her pearls were at that moment in a secret compartment of Ambie's desk, and that he himself was the purchaser. But she never suspected it, and she put the crisp notes into her pocket with the comfortable knowledge that she need not fear the cold for her household, for they would be warmly clad.

After luncheon Ambie drove them back to the shabby little house in Beaconsfield where Mrs. Hout's sister lived. It was small and mean, but it possessed what Mrs. De Beer's splendid mansion lacked, namely, a homelike air of comfort and a cordial welcome for them.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, Kathie and Pearl, accompanied by Mrs. Hout's nephew, a boy of fourteen or fifteen, who had spent all his life in Kimberley and knew every twist and turn of its odd, irregular, intricate streets, started in the tramcars for Kimberley, and were soon in the full business of shopping; and Kathie's fifty pounds, which had seemed such a large sum yesterday, diminished with alarming rapidity. There were clothes to be bought for the boys—shoes, stockings, hats, overcoats, and scarves. Kathie was determined that her boys should

not suffer from cold in the winter as they had from heat in summer. Handkerchiefs, socks, and gloves for her father and soft warm comforters. Dresses, ulsters, and jackets for herself and Pearl, and when these were bought, nearly half her stock was gone.

"And we want hats, Pearl, and gloves and shoes, and we must each have a hood or thick scarf or something of the sort."

"Oh, never mind the scarves, Kathie," said Pearl. "Let us have some books instead; we cannot live, especially in Hebron, without books."

"We cannot live through the winter, and outside, too, without warm clothes. We must leave the books till the last; I think we may afford to buy some; but we must get everything else first," Kathie replied decidedly. "We want a little stationery, too, and some cups and saucers; do you know we have only three cups left which are not handleless; and we need some thick blankets or rugs or something of the kind, at least we shall need them before long."

"But Kathie, *you* cannot buy that sort of thing."

"And why not, pray? I can buy them as well as anything else. You cannot think how I dread the cold weather, especially for papa and Clive, and I am determined to have warm things if possible."

So the blankets were bought, and many another thing which would be needed in the winter months, in anticipation of which Kathie was already shivering, and then they spent a delightful half hour in a well-stocked book store. Here Pearl would have been very extravagant; but Kathie would not let her overstep the bounds which economy laid down.

"I am convinced that we shall want the money by-and-bye," she said, "and we should regret having spent it foolishly. A thousand things might happen to make a few pounds invaluable, and it is best to be prudent."

"Oh yes," sighed Pearl, looking regretfully at the shelves. "You are right as usual, it won't do to be extravagant. But, think of it; spending a few shillings on books is a dreadful extravagance which we dare not contemplate. It is a sign of how we've come down in the world. Come then, take me away out of temptation."

It was nearly dark when they once more reached Mrs. Van Ryn's, tired and hungry, but on the whole very well satisfied with their day's work.

"What time will you be ready to start?" asked Mrs. Hout of Kathie.

"At any time," she replied; "we have finished all our business."

"That's right; then you wouldn't mind starting in the middle of the night. We can sleep in the wagon, if you don't mind, and the boys can inspan at one or two o'clock without waking us up. I am anxious to get home; something is sure to go wrong if I stay away longer."

Kathie willingly consented; she wished to get home also. She did not like to think of the lonely uncomfortable time her father must have had during her absence, and she was anxious to get back to him, and to her boys who would be wanting her too. Accordingly, after tea they made their beds up in the wagon, packed up their purchases, and retired early.

A little after two o'clock Kathie woke up and heard the rain falling steadily and the Kafir boys inspanning the oxen in the darkness, and soon the wagon was rumbling off through the wet streets. By the time they reached the Salt-Pans the rain had ceased, but the sky was grey and cold, the red road muddy, the grass wet, and the vaal bushes drooping dismally. Everything looked very different from what it had been four days before, when the sun had been so bright and the birds had discoursed sweet music among the rocks and trees on the quaint wild kopjes.

They contrived to make themselves very comfortable, however, in spite of wet and cold. Mrs. Hout drew her capje over her head, rolled herself up in a rug and went to sleep. Kathie and Pearl rolled themselves up likewise, and opened their parcel of books and were soon oblivious to wet, mud, dripping leaves, and almost to the clouds of smoke which found their way into the wagon from the fire the natives were making. The weather kept clearing all the afternoon, and by the time they reached Hebron the sun was shining in an almost cloudless sky. Mr. Milner had not returned from his claim when they reached home. The dusty, flapping tents, with their uneven ant-heap floors, seemed more squalid and intolerable than ever after five days' absence from them, and poor Kathie's heart failed her as she looked around the "dining room." Standing in one corner, and looking very much at home in that unaccustomed place were a sieve and two shovels; the table was covered with dirty cups, saucers and plates, scraps of

bread, papers of sugar, pens and ink, and a host of miscellaneous articles which had no right to be there. A sudden recollection of Mrs. De Beer's magnificent drawing-room and dainty morning-room came into her mind as she looked round, and the contrast of her own life with that sheltered guarded one that knew nothing of care or trouble, struck her. The next moment she felt ashamed of herself. Was it possible that she was envying Mrs. De Beer her wealth? Surely not; not for the world would she have changed places with her; so cold, so heartless, so self-absorbed. But if not envy, what then was that feeling of discontent and rebellion against her own lot? She felt very miserable for a little while, but her father's warm embrace and loving greeting, and the boys' enthusiastic delight at having her and Pearl home again, put to flight all sad, dissatisfied thoughts.

The next morning, as soon as the tents had been made tidy and the boys' lessons were over, Kathie brought out her little sewing-machine and commenced the work of turning the rolls of flannel, homespun, and cashmere into useful garments. She and Pearl worked hard, and every day added some finished garment to the pile in the large tin-lined trunk which had been one of Kathie's purchases. Kathie would have worked until late at night, so anxious was she that winter should not find them unprepared; but Pearl positively refused to let her, or to do a stitch herself, after eight o'clock.

"It would not be a bit worse," she declared, "to perish of cold in the winter than to die of over-work before the winter came."

CHAPTER XXII.

WITWATERSRANDT.

HETTY was in the garden. All the packing was done at last, and her farewell visit to East London was over. She had walked up the beach and watched the great, green, white-tipped waves dash with their cannon-like, booming sound into Bat's Cave; she had walked up to the dark end of the cave and startled the unwholesome cloud of bats that always clung to the roof; she had gathered wreaths of green, purple, and shiny brown sea-weed from its grey weather-beaten sides, and picked up stores of the frail white and pink shells

that strewed its sandy floor. She had rowed up the beautiful Buffalo River and gathered bunches of the scarlet lilies, trailing wild geraniums, and delicate ferns which grew along the edges of all its little creeks and coves. She had picnicked with her cousins at Green Point, and spent several delightful days at the Nahoon mouth; bathing in the great breakers; riding up the beach, and rowing over the crystal clear water in which the thousands of rainbow-coloured jelly-fish glided up and down on each side of the boat. She had taken her last look at the dear, beautiful old ocean she had known and loved since her babyhood, and now it was all over and she was home again. The wagons were all loaded and ready for an early start in the morning, and the empty house looked strangely unhomelike, and the bare rooms echoed sadly under her footsteps. Only the old garden was unchanged, and there Hetty had betaken herself as soon as the last thing was done, and she was free to wander about the paths and breathe little valedictory sighs into the ears of her leafy old friends, to whose safe and silent keeping she had confided the secrets of her joys and sorrows ever since her childish days. Tenderly and affectionately their branches seemed to droop above her as if they were loath to part with her who had gambolled, laughed, studied and sung beneath and among them for so long; and perhaps they were, perhaps the Dryads, who according to the old Greek belief dwelt in the tree trunks, felt a sort of dull regret at seeing this young, bright creature leaving her childhood's home, which had been all sunshine, and going forth to meet the troubles and trials which were sure to await her in the future.

The sun had gone down and the short Southern twilight had faded, but the garden was almost as light as day, for the moon was shining in the sky in whose purple depths a few stars, paled by her floods of golden light were beginning to twinkle. Hetty walked slowly up and down each oft-trodden path and gazed at every familiar feature in the landscape; she wished to carry away in her memory an exact picture of it as it looked to-night. The tall trees in the ravine, the lower half of which looked jet black, the white tops silvered over with moonlight, the long hill with the dark patches of bush climbing up its sides, and the wreath of mist resting on the top. The old white house, with its broad verandahs garlanded with grape vines, in front of which the great, dark, blue-gums stood, tall, silent

sentinels, throwing their black, moving shadows upon the roof and far over on to the other side. How beautiful everything looked in the mellow light, which gave a soft ideal beauty to every commonplace detail of the picture. Hetty could scarcely define her own feelings as she looked lingeringly about her. A deepening regret at leaving the old home oppressed her heart; but, mingled with the regret and pain of parting with what had made up her home and home life, and been a part and portion of her childhood and her girlhood, was a stirring spirit of adventure and a longing for change which would have made it a bitter disappointment to her if she had been forced to remain in the old loved place. A yearning for change and excitement, for new scenes and faces, was very strong upon her; all the stronger because she had always loved the old scenes and faces so dearly, and been so contented with her life just as it was. She wondered what the hidden future held for her and hers. But she was far from looking forward fearfully; the past had been so bright that she could not but feel confident that the future would be so also, and Hetty had another and stronger reason for being hopeful—namely, her trust in God. She knew that all her way through life, though covered from her, was known to Him, and if that way was lighted, though only a step at a time, by love and faith, she need not fear to tread it. It was no doubt easy to feel so when all was smooth sailing and her loved ones were with her, but would she feel so, she wondered, if darkness and clouds and difficulties were about her? Would her faith in the dark days be strong as it was now when all was bright? Hetty hoped so, but she did not know; then she remembered that God had promised "that as our day our strength shall be;" and, remembering that, her doubts and fears fled, leaving her comforted, and there was not even a shadow of one of them left the next morning when she took her seat in the wagon and the long journey began.

* * * * * *

"Are we to move into camp to-morrow, father?"

"Yes, I think so, Hetty, I am going there now, and I will decide upon a suitable place to camp. We cannot stay here for ever; I'm afraid you won't like it Het, I almost wish you and your mother had stayed down in the Colony."

"Oh, father, don't say that; it is too late, and mother and I can stand the roughing it as well as you can. We shall not have to live in tents very long, shall we?"

"I hope not long, but it will be some time before we can get our house put up, even when the building materials arrive, and heaven knows when that will be. I can't reconcile myself to the idea of your living such a rough life among such rough neighbours. I wish I had come alone."

"I don't, father; if it is such a rough, miserable place, I am glad we are here to take care of you."

Mr. Brown sighed as he kissed her, and turned away to mount the horse Oswald stood holding for him; he had visited the camp, or rather the camps, several times, and on each occasion he had returned to where his wagons were outspanned more unwilling to take his wife and Hetty into the midst of the noise, confusion, and worse, that reigned there. In time, he knew, all would be different: a large and orderly town would take the place of the rough, lawless camp; but at present all was confusion worse confounded, and he thought regretfully of the quiet, comfortable home which lay so far behind them. Not for himself did he regret it; for he felt that here was his place, here in the stirring rush of busy life where work was to be done and money to be made. But would it not have been better if they had remained in the Colony until things were further developed at Witwatersrandt. However, it was, as Hetty had said, too late now, they were here, and there was nothing for it but to make the best of what he was beginning to fear would prove a very bad business, and the first thing to be done was to choose a suitable place for their temporary home.

The wagons which had brought them so far were out-spanned at the foot of two steep, cone-like kopjes, and after she had watched her father ride away, Hetty proceeded to climb the steeper and prettier of the two. It was warm and pleasant down below, but a stiff breeze blew on the top of the kopje, and southern, sun-loving Hetty was soon glad to sit down upon a mossy ledge under the shelter of a huge projecting boulder of gleaming quartz and look about her. On one side was a long, narrow valley, through the middle of which the broad, red wagon-road ran, bounded by a line of hills all wearing their unattractive winter coat of short, brown grass; on the other the eye roved over a vast stretch of country comprised of wild, rugged hills or kopjes which rose ridge on ridge, one behind the other, away to the horizon. It was unlike anything Hetty had ever seen before, and she thought it beautiful. Beautiful it certainly was

not, except in so far as nature—pure, fresh, and unmarred by the hand of man—is always beautiful, for it lacked the greenness and softness of outline which one generally associates with the idea of a beautiful landscape. But it was not without a certain rugged picturesqueness; the rock-crowned kopjes were of every conceivable shape, some round and smooth, some bold and square, some conical, some dome-shaped, some rose into peaks and pinnacles, some were grey and solemn, and looked like old half-ruined fortresses or green old castles of a by-gone age, and here and there among them, where the sun caught some projecting bluff or jagged point of white quartz, there was a gleam as of burnished silver. Line upon line they rose ridge upon ridge, each one growing fainter and mistier, till they melted away in the purple, hazy distance.

A wild, free, boundless prospect it was over the rolling, wind-blown hills, and Hetty sat pondering many things as she gazed around her. The morning sun climbed higher and higher and at last peeped at her over the top of the rock against which she leaned, then she got up and began to examine the beauties within reach. The great greyish-white or whitish-grey rocks, studded all over with crystal-like quartz and covered with vivid green and rust-coloured lichens, and encircled by wreaths of dead "travellers' joy," were the chief of these. Patches of everlastings grew all over the hill, and Hetty smiled to herself as the fancy crossed her mind that the gold which lay concealed within was cropping out in the form of their bright yellow blossoms. Ferns, too, grew around and in the crevices of the rocks and among the roots of the stunted bushes, not feathery, beautiful fronds such as grew with semi-tropical luxuriance in the deep, wooded, ravines and cool, moist kloofs, on the old Colonial farm; but tough and leathery ferns, which, however, were pretty and quite in keeping with the grim old rocks and thick reeds and grasses amongst which they grew. Many a flower and plant, too, strange and new to Hetty, grew on that wild kopje, and she gathered handfuls to press and send to her cousins as something which had grown in the far Transvaal. She climbed, slipped, and scrambled about its steep sides, then mounted to the top of its sister kopje from whence she obtained a still wider view of the far-stretching, billowing ridges, and also caught glimpses of a few scattered farm-houses. She fell to thinking how great a change had come over them and over the lives of those who dwelt in them, how poor and lonely they had been,

how far removed from the rest of the world, cut off by their high, bleak ranges of hills; and how, at the discovery of the wealth which had for long ages lain hidden in those very isolating hills, all was changed, and a world of enterprise and busy throbbing life had come suddenly into their midst, bringing them into contact with their fellow-men, gathered from a dozen different climes, and how now the barren rocky farms, almost any one of which would two years ago have been gladly exchanged for a span of oxen, were worth thousands of pounds. Hetty felt her sympathies growing wider, her heart warmer, and her pulses beat with the quick stirring life which seemed to blow to her across the ridges from that other ridge where the camps were clustered, and where every day added to the number of busy gold-seekers.

The next day they moved into the camp. They did not pitch their tents among the others, though, but on the broad flat where Johannesburg has since grown up. It was evening when they arrived there, but it was still light enough to see all the features of the great camp. As the wagon moved slowly along, they could hear issuing from some of the tents snatches of songs, bursts of laughter, and loud voices raised in fierce dispute; every tenth tent was a liquor shop from which came the sound of oaths, jingling of glasses, and loud drunken songs. Was it for this they had exchanged their quiet old farm life? but in spite of its lawlessness, its roughness, in spite of much that was unpleasant and even terrifying, it had a strange fascination for Hetty, this being brought into contact with a sort of life of which she had read and heard, but which she had never expected to see. The old life had been happy, sunny, and very free from care, and she had never wished for a different life; but now she felt glad that it was over, that she was hundreds of miles from the old home. It was delightful to feel that she was in a new land, even in the Transvaal, which had always seemed so remote, much more so than Australia or India which lay beyond the ocean. Yes, she was away up in the Transvaal, on the Witwatersrandt Gold Fields; life could not be dull or prosaic or monotonous here. The broad misty flat on which they outspanned, with the steep kopjes to the northward, the clustering tents with their twinkling lights, and the feeling of half-mysterious romance and interest which always invests a place which is entirely new to us, but about which we have heard and thought a great deal, seemed to forbid the idea of anything commonplace.

By the time, however, that Hetty had lived in the dusty, draughty tents for two weeks the novelty had worn off, and with it the romance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HANDSOME STRANGER.

HETTY was standing at the door of one of the tents, looking out for her father and hoping he would come home before the storm, which had been threatening all day, should burst upon them. The wind blew strong and cold over the flat, and Hetty, who loved warmth and sunshine as much as any bright-winged bird of the tropics, shivered and shrank from the keen blast. Presently Mr. Brown came, and a few minutes afterwards the storm burst in all its fury. Great torrents of rain fell, which in a little while converted the flat country around into a broad lake.

"I got back just in time," said Mr. Brown, as he seated himself in front of the steaming cup of coffee Hetty placed on the table for him. "I hope we are not going to have much of this kind of weather. These tents will be poor protection if we do."

"Where have you been all the morning, father?"

"Just over here where they are laying out the town. I have been buying a number of stands."

"Is that a good investment?" asked his wife anxiously.

"The very best, I think. I believe that land will rise in value every day. If it rises, as I expect it will, the fortune we used to talk about will not be so very far off."

"That is good news, father," replied Hetty, with her flashing smile, "and then we'll go home."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Brown, pinching her cheek. "You have only been here a fortnight, and you want to go home already."

"No, I don't want to go yet; but I shall want to go as soon as we have made our fortune."

"Well, well, I hope we shall not be exiles long. But whom have we here?" he added, as the tall figure of a man appeared at that moment in the doorway, dripping like a river god, and holding by the bridle a beautiful white horse from whose satiny coat the water poured in little streams.

The stranger raised his hat courteously as Mr. Brown turned to the door.

"Pardon me," he began apologetically, "but I came to request shelter for a few minutes until the storm abates a little."

"Certainly, by all means, come in," answered Mr. Brown cordially, holding back the tent flap. "But what will you do with your horse?"

"I will fasten him between the tents if I may. When he saw your camp he positively refused to go any farther; he is always restive in a thunderstorm."

"He's a splendid animal," said Mr. Brown, surveying the trembling, terrified creature with his critical farmer's eyes as the young man proceeded to fasten his bridle around one of the posts. "Have you had an accident?" he asked as he ushered the stranger into the tent, glancing at the arm which he carried in a sling.

"Yes, I met with a slight accident this morning, nothing serious, but sufficient to render me unable to manage my horse when he became restive. I ought to have remained in the camp, but I fancied I should be able to outride the storm, and reach home before it became very violent."

"You do not live in the camp, then?"

"No, I live on a farm, fifteen or twenty miles from here. Thank you," he added, rising to take from Mrs. Brown the cup of coffee she handed him. "You are a new arrival on the Randt, I presume, Mr.——"

"Brown," supplemented the owner of the name. "Yes, we arrived only two weeks ago from the Colony. You are also a new arrival—from England, I should say."

"No," replied the stranger, "my residence in the Transvaal dates from a year and a-half previous to the discovery of the gold here."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Brown with a slight accent of surprise. "You have been here more than two years then?"

"Nearly three; I am an old inhabitant."

"And have you faith in the gold discoveries? I mean do you think the gold exists here in as large quantities as people imagine."

"I believe that people have as yet a very faint idea of the immense riches of this part of the country. I believe that gold exists here in vast quantities."

"I am very glad to hear you say so; for some of my

friends have been trying to persuade me that the money I have invested here is as good as thrown away."

"I hope, and I think, that you will soon prove them to have been mistaken. I myself have the most implicit faith in the ultimate success and prosperity of these fields."

"Buying stands in the township will prove a good investment, don't you think."

"Very good, I should say. I should have brought some to-day if I had not already invested all my spare capital in other things."

"You are not a farmer, I presume."

"No, except in so far as living in a farmhouse makes me one. All the farming that is done is the work of my Zulu servant; he contrives to raise a few vegetables for our use. I purchased the farm from the owner, because I believed from numerous indications that the ground was auriferous, at least that was one of my reasons."

"Ah, you have been prospecting on your farm, I suppose."

"No. I should have done so if I could have persuaded the owner to join me in the undertaking; but he scouted the idea, and almost succeeded in persuading me that the ground was valueless except for agricultural purposes. He said that the cry of 'gold, gold,' in the Transvaal had been raised so often that he had long ceased to believe in it. But I liked the farm for many reasons, and I purchased it from him for a small sum."

"You were in luck, I daresay it is worth as many hundreds to-day as you paid sovereigns for it."

"Yes; and by this time next year it will be worth twice as many thousands, and more." The stranger spoke these words in no tone of pleasure or elation, but as if he were merely stating a fact which was of little importance and of no interest to him. He was very handsome, with clear-cut regular features which bore the unmistakable stamp of good birth and refined breeding. But, more striking than his beauty, which was remarkable both in kind and degree, was the expression of deep sadness which hung like a veil over his whole face; his large dark eyes were full of a deep, unchanging melancholy, and even his slight unfrequent smile was tinged with sadness. There was a weary look about his face when in repose, and his thick, rather long hair, was plentifully besprinkled with silver threads which certainly had not come with years.

"Did you never try to find out if there really was gold on your farm?" asked Mr. Brown, looking at him with growing interest.

"Never, until within the last three months; my health was far from good when I first came here, and I had neither the energy nor the capital necessary for such a work. I was content to wait until others should come and prove my theories to be correct."

"And they have done so?"

"They have; a rich reef runs through the entire farm."

"I suppose it would take something to persuade you to part with it."

"Yes, I should not care to sell it; for, apart from its value, I like it, it is quiet and lonely, and——" he broke off abruptly and then added, "and I have grown attached to the place and should be very unwillng to leave it."

"It must be a somewhat dull and lonely life for a young man like you."

"I find it both at times, but when my books pall upon me, and the solitude grows insupportable, I pack up my traps, lock up the house, and I and my servant go north for a few weeks or months of hunting," and then, as if anxious to turn the conversation from himself and his own affairs, he changed the subject and talked of other things.

"I wish I could get my house built!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, shivering, as all at once the tent blew open, and a chilly blast swept through. "I expected the building materials I ordered to be here when I arrived. I cannot imagine what has delayed them; I have no fancy for living outside in this fashion, as I don't happen to be a gipsy by birth."

"It is very far from comfortable in weather like this," replied the young man, with a glance at Hetty, who sat wrapped in a huge cloak, her bright head covered with a thick red scarf.

"Very far, and next month will be colder, I expect. I am tempted to wish, for my wife and daughter's sake, I had stayed down below until after the winter, or else brought building materials up with me," said Mr. Brown, his brow contracting in the worried frown which it always pained Hetty so much to see.

The stranger did not reply, but sat looking out abstractedly at the falling rain. After a few minutes silence he remarked—

"I suppose you would not care for a house at a distance from the camp?"

"I should not mind that, it would be rather an advantage than otherwise if it was not too far. You know, perhaps, of a house I could hire until I get mine built."

"I am thinking of my own house; it contains eight rooms, and I only occupy three. If you are willing to become my tenants you are welcome to occupy the remaining five until the winter is over, or longer if you wish."

"You are a friend in need!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, delightedly. "Such an arrangement would relieve me of a great burden of anxiety. What do you say, Marion, shall we accept this gentleman's most kind offer and become his tenants?"

"I should be very glad indeed to exchange these gusty tents for a comfortable house. But I fear you would find us in your way," she added, turning to the stranger.

"Not in the least," he replied heartily. "But I fear the house is not exactly what you would call comfortable, at least, only comparatively;" with a glance at the damp floor and dripping canvas. "Damp and dust have been allowed to run riot there ever since I have owned the house except in the rooms I use myself. It is in tolerable repair, though, and could be made habitable in a few hours, I daresay."

"Then I think we will say 'done' to it. I am sure we shall be everlastingly grateful to you for your kind offer."

"Not at all, you are very welcome, and I have no use for the rooms myself; but before we consider the matter settled would it not be advisable for you to look at the place; it is very lonely and the prospect very dismal."

"We shall not mind that. After three months of living outside in all winds and weathers we shall be glad to have a roof over our heads once more, I can tell you. But I will ride over and look at it, and we can come to terms about it; shall you be at home to-morrow?"

"Yes, all day to-morrow after eleven."

And so it was arranged; and presently, the storm somewhat abating, the young man took his leave, after pointing out to Mr. Brown the direction in which his farm lay.

"Well, that's an unexpected slice of luck," said the latter, when he had watched him gallop away and disappear over one of the steep, rocky hills. "We'll have a house sooner than we expected, after all."

"I am very glad," replied his wife. "But is it not very strange?"

"Isn't what strange?"

"Why, for a man like that to be living up here in what was, until lately, one of the loneliest and dreariest parts of the Transvaal."

"I don't see anything strange about it. He is most likely a tolerably well-off Englishman, who came out to South Africa for his health in the first place, and got fond of the country and stayed, that's all."

"I don't think that is all; a man like that would scarcely bury himself alive here without some reason."

"If he liked the place that would be reason enough, wouldn't it? And what do you mean by a man 'like that'?"

"Did you look at him?"

"Yes, I looked at him, of course. What then?"

"Did you see anything when you looked?"

"Yes, I saw a good-looking young man with uncommonly nice manners."

"Good-looking," repeated Mrs. Brown. "Why, he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

"Well, and what of that?"

"And," continued she, without noticing the interruption, "he has the air of the very best society about him."

"Now, Mrs. Brown!" he exclaimed laughing. "Pray what can you—a Cape Colonial farmeress—know about the 'very best society'?"

"I know enough to be able to see at a glance that that young man has never moved in any other," she answered undauntedly. "His manners are perfect."

"Hoity toity; I'll be getting jealous by-and-bye. And, pray, Hetty, did you admire this demi-god as much as your mother did?"

"Well," said Hetty, laughing, "I certainly thought him handsome; whether he has always moved in the best society I don't feel competent to say."

"I don't know whether he is handsome or not," put in Oswald; "but he has a stunning horse, and he knows how to ride it; and I'm jolly glad that we are going to get into a house again. I hope we'll have some decent bread when we get there. I'm tired of roaster cakes; Alette never cooks them ready enough."

Meanwhile the stranger was riding homewards. As soon

as he was out of sight of the tents he dropped the reins on his horse's neck and permitted the animal to pick his way slowly among the stones and puddles in the road.

"Why did I do it?" he muttered to himself. "What could I have been dreaming of to consent to—nay, propose—having my dearly-valued privacy invaded? I must be a fool.. And yet," he continued, speaking his thoughts aloud, as people who live much alone are apt to do, "it cannot make much difference to me—not any. I shall be away almost all the next three months, and by the end of that time their own house will most probably be finished, and they will go. It would have been nothing short of brutal to permit them to remain in those wretched tents all through the winter when I have five snug rooms standing empty. I could not do it. But why did I go there to seek shelter? I do not remember ever before to have voluntarily sought intercourse with any European. Have I done wisely, I wonder? But it is too late to think of that now, and it is impossible for me to live much longer the hermit life I have been living now that the population is increasing so fast, and every day throws me into contact with some one. What a gentle, sweet-looking woman that is! she reminded me of my mother, though she is not in the least like her; and what a beautiful, bright-faced girl! I should like to paint her with that red shawl wrapped around her. She looks as if clouds and care have never touched her or come near her life. How strange it is that some lives are all dark, and others all brightness and sunshine! And yet, should I complain? Was not my life bright and fair enough until my own sin darkened and blackened it? If only—oh! if only I could blot out the memory of—if only I could undo the past!"

Presently he came in sight of the lonely farmhouse where he had lived so long. He raised his eyes, and looked at it with more than usual interest. It was a long, very low house, with a thatched roof, and a broad verandah supported by pillars of rough, uncut stone. It had once worn a coat of whitewash, but that had long since been rubbed off by time and storm; so had the plaster under it; and the bricks, faded to a dull, yellowish grey, showed through in patches. A slender column of smoke curled up from one of its chimneys. On one side of the house a few wind-blown vegetables struggled for existence; on the other were some bags of coal, a pile of wood, and a row of blue gum-trees. Always dreary,

the old house, surrounded by barren, stony kopjes, looked more than usually forlorn and dismal under the grey stormy sky.

"It is a dreary-looking place," he said to himself as he dismounted and led his horse round to the stable. "But at any rate it is water-tight, and perhaps they will be more comfortable here than in those tents. Come, Alba, old fellow, you will want a good supper to-night, won't you?"

After making his horse comfortable he took from a nail in the stable wall a rusty key, and going back to the house proceeded to unlock the empty rooms. They did not look very inviting; the unboarded floors were inches deep in dust, the walls and ceilings were festooned with cobwebs, and the small panel windows so dirty that it was impossible to see through them. The young man looked around with a strong expression of disapproval; he wished the rooms were a shade less cheerless and dirty.

"I must make Tozeni turn in here in the morning with a mop and a broom, and see if he can effect a change for the better. These rooms have been given up to the beetles and spiders so long that they are unfit for human habitation."

In spite of his love of seclusion and solitude he could not help feeling a growing pleasure in the prospect of intercourse with his fellows; and he fell to picturing to himself how the rooms would look when the sweet-faced lady sat sewing by the window, the genial, kindly farmer sat reading under the verandah, and when the girl with the speaking brown eyes flitted about the house.

"I was never made to live alone," he said, with a slight, half bitter smile. "I believe I am actually glad that they are coming." Then he replaced the key on its nail and went to that part of the house occupied by himself and his servant. It was separated from the other rooms by a narrow dusty passage, the upper part of the walls of which were rough with ancient swallows' nests veiled with cobwebs.

From the kitchen came a dull, monotonous sound of singing, and as the young man passed the door, a rough, woolly head and broad, black face were thrust out.

"Oh!" exclaimed the owner of the face in accents of relief, and smiling broadly, "you've come back, master. I was afraid you were going to stay away all night."

"No," replied his master in Zulu, in which tongue also the native had spoken, "I wouldn't leave you alone all night in a thunderstorm, Tozeni, I know what a coward you are."

The Zulu shook his head as if to deny the charge, and going back to the kitchen resumed his growling song and his occupation of coffee-grinding. His master followed him in, and stood for a few minutes in front of the fire warming his hands; then he asked the Zulu if there was a fire inside, and being answered in the affirmative, he opened the rough unpainted door and entered a small inner room, which, though scantily furnished, contrasted pleasantly with the bare, dusty rooms he had just been examining. The floor was guiltless of rug or carpet, but it was boarded and scrubbed white; a small table stood in the middle of the room; one side of the wall was covered with rough shelves filled with books; and on the other hung an almanac, several maps, and a rack holding guns and whips. As soon as he opened the door a great dog that had been lying before the fire sprang up and bounded upon him, nearly upsetting him.

"Well, Rollo? softly, softly, old friend. Are you so glad to see me?" he said, his face brightening wonderfully as he stroked the dog's great yellow head and permitted him to lick his hand.

He sat down in a low chair before the fire, and the dog crouched down at his feet and looked up at him with his honest eyes, as if he sympathised with his master's sadness and would fain have read the secret of his changeless melancholy. Presently the door opened and the Zulu appeared carrying a tray containing a cup of steaming coffee and a plate of hard biscuits. The young man took the tray from him, thanking him with the gentle, unfailing courtesy he manifested towards every one, black or white.

"Do not bring me anything more to-night, Tozeni," he said, as the Zulu withdrew. Then he lighted one of the candles which stood ready on the table, drank his coffee, and gave the biscuits to the dog; then seating himself before the fire, he fell once more into a profound reverie, the expression of sadness growing deeper and deeper on his face as he sat gazing into the red coal-caverns with eyes that saw them not. The dog, having finished his repast, returned to his old position, and so the two sat still, motionless, hour after hour, far into the stormy night, while the rain poured down and the fierce gusts of wind rattled against

the ill-fitting window-sashes. The candle burned down in the socket and went sputtering out, and the room was in darkness, save for the tremulous red bars, where each separate, dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KLIPKOPJES FARM.

THE rain had ceased the next morning, and the sun was shining brilliantly when Mr. Brown reined up his horse before the farmhouse door. Tozeni had just been sweeping out the empty rooms and was busy polishing the windows. He dropped his cloth and hurried forward to take the horse.

"Mist' Blown?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes; is your master at home?"

Tozeni shook his head and pointed over the hills, then invited Mr. Brown to inspect the rooms while he put his horse up in the stable.

Mr. Brown did so, and mentally pronounced that they would "do splendidly." "I wonder if he will object to our moving in at once. I should be more thankful than I can say to get Marion and Hetty out of those tents before we have any more rain, and away from that noisy camp. I thought he said he would be at home by eleven, and it is half-past now."

"Master say you must come inside and wait till he come back," said Tozeni at his elbow. "He not be long now," he continued, as he conducted him into the room where his master had kept his lonely vigil the night before. Mr. Brown looked about him with undisguised interest; for, in spite of his sarcastic replies to his wife's remarks on the subject, he was obliged to confess that their yesterday's visitor was an uncommonly attractive and interesting man, and by no means the sort of person one might expect to meet in a tumble-down old Dutch farmhouse. A man of education too, to judge by the books that filled the rough shelves. Virgil, Homer, Plato, Schiller, and Dante were among the authors who contributed to his amusement and instruction. "A college man," thought the farmer to himself. "I wonder what his name is."

Mr. Brown might have found that out easily enough, for it was written in bold, clear characters on the fly-leaf of all

the books; but it did not suit his notions thus to obtain the information he desired; he preferred to wait until the owner himself should tell him.

Mr. Brown had not been in the room very long, when its owner entered, riding-whip in hand, and followed by his great, tawny dog.

"Oh! good-day, Mr. Brown; Tozeni told me I should find you here. I trust I have not kept you waiting long."

"Not a great while, I have been amusing myself looking at your books; they are not such as one usually sees in a farm-house of this description."

"I suppose not. These are but a fourth part of my possessions in that line. I shall be happy to offer you the freedom of my library if you come to live here."

"Thank you, I shall like to read some of them; but I am no classical scholar. Greek and Latin are sealed books to me, and I cannot read German—I only know Schiller from translations."

"That is a pity; Schiller loses a good deal in translation. But I have many books in our own language which you will no doubt appreciate. Will you look at the rooms now?"

"I have already done so by your servant's invitation. I hope you will allow us to move in at once."

"Oh! You think they will do, then? When I looked at them after I returned last night, I felt half ashamed of myself for having offered them to you."

"They will do splendidly; I'm sure I'm very grateful to you. I look upon that storm as a perfect godsend, inasmuch as it forced you to take shelter with us. I shall be glad to get my people away from the camp as soon as possible. I presume you would have no objection to our taking up our abode here at once?"

"None at all. Why should I have? Come to-day if you like."

"Thank you once more. We'll begin to pack up, then, the instant I get back."

"Very well, it is settled then."

"Not quite, we have not yet arranged terms of payment."

"We have no such terms to arrange; those rooms are of no use to me. If I stay here ten years they will only stand empty. I could not dream of receiving rent for them."

"And I could not dream of occupying two-thirds of your house without paying for it. If you refuse to take rent for them we shall have to remain in our tents."

"In that case I have nothing more to say," replied the young man, smiling at the resolute tone. "But you must make your own terms, for I shall not take it upon my conscience to charge you anything for the use of those dirty, dusty, unfloored rooms without ceilings."

"Unfloored and without ceilings as they are, they will be a perfect haven of refuge to us, and worth as much as any other house would be."

"They are worth nothing to me, why should I take money for them?"

"They are worth a great deal to me, why should I not pay for them?" demanded Mr. Brown, half laughing, half vexed at his persistence. "But if you will not charge me anything I must do it myself. Shall we say ten pounds a month?"

"No, certainly not, I positively refuse to take such a sum for those empty, barn-like rooms," replied the young man, decidedly. "If you insist upon paying for them, I will consent to receive half that amount, and not one penny more."

"Very well, so be it then; but I don't like to feel that I am cheating anyone, and you could get a tenant to-morrow if you liked who would willingly pay you three times as much as that, and more."

"But I do not like; I never dreamed of letting those rooms until yesterday, when I heard you wishing for some more weather-tight abode than those flapping, leaky tents, and it struck me that you might make shift with them until your own house was built. But I assure you, if you do not take them they will be left in the possession of their old occupants, the bats and spiders. I shall most certainly not let them to anyone else."

And with that Mr. Brown was obliged to be content.

"May I ask your name?" he said, as he rose to go. "It would be convenient to know it."

"Certainly, I beg your pardon, I thought I had told you. My name is Vere—Philip Vere."

"Well, it is all settled; we can move into the house whenever we like," said Mr. Brown as he entered the tent where Mrs. Brown and Hetty were awaiting him."

"Oh, father, how delightful!" exclaimed the latter, clapping her hands. "May we go to-day?"

"Yes; I propose that we pack up immediately after dinner, eh, Marion? And so, Miss Hetty, you are glad to be done with this camp life which was going to be so delightful and romantic? But I must say I haven't heard you grumbling much."

"No," she returned, with her arch, bright smile, "it isn't worth while to grumble at what can't be helped; but if we are going away I can say what I like and it won't matter; so I don't mind confessing that there's nothing romantic about it; and I am heartily tired of gipsying in this uncomfortable fashion."

"Very right, my dear; never waste your time complaining about the inevitable."

"What sort of a house is it?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"Oh, just an ordinary Dutch farmhouse, a little the worse for wear. The rooms have ant-heap floors, no ceilings, doors that divide in the middle, and very small windows; but I daresay we can contrive to make ourselves very comfortable there. There's a very decent stable too, where we can put the horses. Altogether, compared with this it is a palace; we are very fortunate to have got hold of it."

"Had we not better send Alette and one of the boys over first to clean the rooms up a little before we go?" asked Mrs. Brown. "I have a great objection to moving into a damp, chilly house that has been shut up for years."

"There will be no occasion. When I got there I found our friend's Zulu boy busy doing all the necessary cleaning. So we have nothing to do but move in as soon as we are ready."

"That was very thoughtful of Mr. —— by-the-bye, what is his name? It is awkward to speak of any one as 'he' always."

"Yes, especially of a prince in disguise. His name is Philip Vere."

"Well, he has a princely name at any rate," laughed Hetty.

"I had the greatest difficulty to persuade him to take any rent for the rooms. He said they were of no use to him, and he saw no reason for taking payment for them; but I told him that if he refused to let me pay we could not take the rooms; so he at last consented to receive a nominal rent. What have you got for dinner, Hetty. Is it ready?"

"Nearly ready. We have only got roaster cakes and some of Mrs. French's Cape gooseberry jelly. I did not try to cook dinner, it has been so windy all the morning."

"I should think not; we shall have no more cooking outside after to-day, thank goodness. Nothing could be better than Mrs. French's jelly, and we all appreciate roaster cakes—all but poor Oswald."

After dinner the things were hastily packed and loaded up, the tents pulled down, and before long they reached the farm. Just as they arrived opposite the rickety gate, Mr. Vere on his noble white horse, followed by Tozeni mounted on a little wiry Basuto pony, rode out of the yard. Each had a gun slung at his back, and each carried a huge saddle bag, and had a blanket and overcoat strapped to his saddle, while Rollo careered about them in a manner quite different from his usual dignified deportment, as if the expedition on which he and his master were bound gave him the most unbounded pleasure.

Mr. Vere rode up to the back of the wagon and courteously bade Mrs. Brown and Hetty welcome to Klipkopjes Farm.

"You look as if you were starting on a long journey, Mr. Vere," said Mr. Brown. "May I ask where you are off to?"

"I cannot quite tell you; I am going north for a few weeks' hunting, or it may be a few months. I am never certain when I go away how soon I shall return. I rather think that I shall go as far as the Zambesi this time."

"Alone?"

"Yes, with Tozeni, or it is possible that I may meet with a friend of mine at Barberton, and in that case he will accompany me. In my absence I trust you will use the house and all about it as if it were your own. Good-bye."

"Thanks. Good-bye; a pleasant trip to you, and plenty of sport."

"That's a queer fellow," remarked Mr. Brown, as the young man and his swarthy attendant disappeared over a neighbouring hill. "He did not say a word about going away when I was here this morning."

By the time the wagons were unloaded it was too late to do more than carry in a table and a few chairs, and boil the kettle for tea, and Hetty went to bed with all sorts of plans running in her head for making the bare rooms bright and home-like. The next morning, when her father had ridden away to the camp, she proceeded to put some of them into execution.

"Mother," she began, as soon as she had tucked back her sleeves, tied a cloth over her bright hair, and covered

her dress with a large apron, "which room is to be our parlour?"

"Our parlour, my dear child? I think we must do without one; we have nothing to furnish a parlour with."

"Oh, I will undertake the furnishing; I have all sorts of wonderful plans waiting to be put into execution, if you will only give me leave to try."

"You have my permission to do what you like, but I hope you are not going to turn cabinet-maker, and endeavour to manufacture tables and chairs."

"Oh, no; nothing of that sort. I don't say I won't do a little carpentering with Oswald's help, for I am determined to have one bright, pretty room. You have no idea what wonderful results I mean to effect by a judicious arrangement of some of our old book-shelves, screens, and cushions. I have great faith in turkey-red twill and brass headed nails, and I mean to crewel a marvellous cover for that hideous old mantel-piece. But first of all I must hide those dreadful whitewashed walls. May I try my hand at paperhanging?"

"Paperhanging! We have no paper."

"Yes we have, mother; don't you remember that paper that father bought for my room just before we talked of leaving home? I think that will do nicely."

"But your room was smaller than these; your paper will not be sufficient."

"Oh, yes, I think there will be quite enough to cover the smaller of the two front rooms, and if there isn't, I shall make up with something else, anything will be better than that ghastly whitewash."

"Very well, do what you like, Hetty; but won't Mr. Vere think, perhaps, that we have taken a liberty?"

"I don't see why he should; he told us to make ourselves at home, and I'm inclined to take him at his word. If he finds, after we are gone, that the paper troubles his dreams, he can pull it off again, it won't take long."

"Very well, do as you please. But don't you think that we had better turn our attention to the other rooms first?"

"Oh, mother, of course, I don't want to begin upon my parlour until everything else is finished."

"That's right; then we will begin with the bed-rooms first of all."

"Yes, I am glad we brought plenty of that cocoa-nut

matting I always despised so much; we shall be able to cover all these floors. Oh, yes, the parlour can wait, there will be all the more time for my plans to mature."

They worked away diligently all that day and the next, and on the third, Hetty was free to follow her own inclinations. First, she papered the walls, with the help of Alette; then she covered the dusty ant-heap floors with the course cocoa-nut matting. She carried in her grandmother's little ebony table and two pretty easy-chairs, contrived several ottomans out of packing cases, and, with the aid of Oswald, some stout planks, and several yards of canvas, she made four chairs, which exhibition of ingenuity caused Alette to fall into silent ecstasies. But her masterpiece was a broad, low couch. This she made "all by herself," with only a little aid from Pambani, one of the Kafir drivers, and when it was finished, it certainly was a credit to her inventive powers and carpentering skill.

While all this work was going forward, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Brown was allowed so much as to peep into the room. "No," Hetty would say, if either of them came to the door. "I don't want you to look in until I have finished; then I will open the door of the enchanted chamber and let it burst in all the splendour of completeness upon your dazzled eyes."

When what Hetty called the "skeleton" of the room was finished, she began the work of beautifying it. She covered her couch and chairs with dark-coloured cretonne, and made cushions for them. These last were only of turkey-red twill, but when finished off with a cord and tassels, they gave a very effective touch of colour to the dingy room. Then she put up curtains to the two small windows, and padded the window seats, which fortunately were broad and low. Oswald, who had a taste for carving, made several pretty brackets; and when Hetty hung up the book-shelves which they had brought from home, and filled them with books, draped the mantel-piece with her marvel of crewel-work, framed and hung up two or three water-colour sketches her cousins had given her, had the piano and music-stand carried in, and scattered a few little knick-knacks about the room, she pronounced her work complete, and was delighted with the successful transformation she had wrought.

Mrs. Brown was really astonished when Hetty and Oswald, closely followed by Alette, conducted her into the bright little room.

"You have done wonders," she said, looking with affectionate pride at Hetty. "It looks very pretty and home-like."

"You haven't been jumping any of Vere's furniture, I hope?" said Mr. Brown, peeping over his wife's shoulder.

"Certainly not, father, what do you take me for? We did it all ourselves—paper-hanging, cabinet-making, upholstering, and everything. How does it look?"

"Magnificent! Did you pack up a magic wand in one of your trunks? The room is a credit to you, Hetty; but I am curious to know how you managed that sofa."

"No, father, I won't tell you; it is to remain a profound secret; but you need not be afraid to lie down on it on that account. I made Pambani jump on it to test its strength."

"So Pambani's in the secret, is he?"

"Yes; I was obliged to have a little of his help. I am glad you think it is a success."

Then Hetty went to the piano, and the new home was baptized in song.

About three weeks after this, Hetty was riding along the road on her spirited brown horse, Tommy. She carried in her hand a stout sjambok of her father's—not for use against Tommy, for Hetty would have scorned to ride a horse which required the persuasion of whip or spur; but her mother had objected to her riding out alone, and she had taken the sjambok, saying laughingly that no one would venture to molest her if she carried such a formidable weapon. Mrs. Brown had been only half convinced and very reluctant to agree to her going alone.

"Go for a walk instead," she had advised, "and take Alette with you; I don't think you ought to ride about alone here as you used to do at home. Wouldn't it be better to wait until to-morrow, and then go with father or Oswald?"

"I don't think so, mother. Who would interfere with me?" Hetty had answered. "I shall not go far, and this is the first really nice afternoon we have had for a fortnight."

And Mrs. Brown had consented, though very reluctantly, calling after her as she rode out of the gate—

"Remember, Hetty, don't go far, I shall be uneasy until you return."

The day was beautiful, the sky was darkly blue and cloudless, and, though the wind was blowing its usual stiff gale, the sun shone warm and bright, and Hetty's spirits rose

jubilantly as, once over the steep kopje, she galloped along the hard road, enjoying to the utmost the swift motion through the crisp air; and Tommy bounded along seemingly as pleased to have his young mistress on his back as she was to be there. On the top of a steep rocky hill Hetty reined him up and stopped to enjoy the prospect.

On every side the hills spread out like rolling billows, most of them bare and rocky, and only a few crowned with ragged thorn-trees, and to the north-east the Magaliesberg Mountains stretched, looking like a line of purple islands in an ocean of yellow haze. It was not a beautiful landscape, but it was fresh, wild, and free, and Hetty realized once more that she was in a new land and that the old home and life were far behind. For some time she galloped on lightly as a bird, until, remembering her mother's caution, she turned Tommy's head homewards again.

She had ridden about half the distance in the direction of home when she perceived a man standing near the road, leaning against a great rock close past which she would have to ride; and, as she drew nearer, she saw that he was a black man, a Zulu or Kafir of extremely unprepossessing appearance, and that he was regarding her intently. She grasped her sjambok tightly, and urged Tommy into a quicker canter. But just as she was passing the rock the man sprang foward, and, seizing her bridle, stopped Tommy with a jerk.

"What do you want?" demanded Hetty in a steady voice, but with blanching cheeks. "Let go my bridle at once."

"I want money, little missus," he said whiningly, but with a dogged determined look in his evil face.

"I have no money with me," she replied. "Let my horse go."

"No, little missus. I can't let you go till you give me gelt. I'm hungry."

"If you are hungry you can come to the house where my father lives and he will give you food; but I have no money to give you, and if you don't take your hand off my bridle I'll make my horse go over you. Stand back!"

"No, young missus," he said, dropping the whining tone and speaking quick and decidedly in Kafir, "if you have no money to give me I will have your horse."

The next moment he had jerked the sjambok from her and laid his hand on Tommy's neck, and then—it was done

so quickly that Hetty never knew quite how it was done—the sjambok was snatched from his grasp and brought down furiously upon his head and shoulders, and he was flung aside with such force that he fell heavily and rolled over into a stony gully on the other side of the road, whence he lay motionless, either because he was unable to rise, or more probably because he thought it the better policy to remain quiet.

Having disposed thus summarily of the native, the man who had arrived so opportunely on the scene gathered up the reins and gave them silently, with the sjambok, to Hetty.

"Thank you," she said, in a tone of deep gratitude, taking them from him with trembling fingers. "I am very much obliged to you for saving me from that wretch."

"Did you not know that it was unsafe for you to ride about alone?" he asked, without noticing her thanks.

"I shall know for the future," she replied, somewhat surprised at his tone, which was such as he might have used to a naughty child.

"How far are you from your home?"

"Not far—about two miles I think."

"You did not come from the camp, then? Allow me to escort you home. It is unsafe for a man to go about here unarmed, and for a lady to ride alone is simply madness."

"I thought it could not be unsafe if I did not go far," she said, as, without waiting for permission, he placed himself at her bridle and walked along beside her. He did not answer, and, after they had traversed the first few hundred yards, appeared to have forgotten her existence. Hetty began to think that this region abounded in strange and romantic individuals. Other eyes might have failed to perceive anything romantic about the roughly-dressed figure that tramped along silently at Tommy's side, and perhaps it was the fund of romance in Hetty herself which made her invest with a halo of mystery and interest anyone a little different from the ordinary run of humanity. Certainly there was nothing commonplace about this man. He was a gentleman without doubt, his air, accent, and an indefinable something about him, proclaimed that unmistakably, in spite of his abrupt, almost rude manner, and his coarse, shabby garments. Some people might have called him handsome, but there was something unpleasant, Hetty thought, in the large, hollow, unnaturally brilliant eyes and

tightly compressed lips. His cheeks were sunken, and his pale complexion contrasted unpleasantly with his dark hair and jet black eyebrows. Hetty wondered who he was, and if he meant to walk the entire distance in the absolute unbroken silence which she was beginning to find somewhat embarassing. Perhaps he found it so, too, for by-and-bye he looked up with something less of sternness in his eyes and remarked—

"This is a handsome little animal; does he belong to you?"

"Yes, he is mine," she answered, patting Tommy's glossy neck affectionately. "I owe it to you that he was not taken from me. I am exceedingly grateful to you."

"You need not be; any one who happened to be passing would have done as much for you, and it gave me quite as much pleasure to chastise that insolent native as it gave you to see it done, and more."

"Was he much hurt, do you think?" she asked, hesitatingly: she had not half liked the motionless, stiff look of the man as he lay face downwards in the gully.

"No, he is not much hurt, not half enough. I only wish I had had time to give him a good deal more."

"He looked as if he were dead."

"You need not alarm yourself on his account, I assure you. If he had been a white man that fall might have killed him; but it won't do *him* any harm—unfortunately. I hope you will not be so unwise in the future as to ride alone."

"I shall not, indeed," she replied, fervently. "I shall be afraid to go a dozen yards from the door."

"That would be going to the other extreme," he said, smiling. "But I advise you not to go very far by yourself, especially on this road; it always swarms with natives from all parts, the off-scourings of Kimberley and Natal. Of course, as the population of the Randt increases the number of *mauvais sujets* increases also. I myself never go out unarmed."

"I am not exactly unarmed," she told him, glancing at her sjambok. "I thought this looked formidable enough to keep all evilly-disposed persons at a distance."

"It might prove sufficient protection if you were sure of being allowed to keep it in your own possession and use it yourself; but you see it fell into the enemy's hand at the very outset."

"Yes, I shall not trust to it again; I deserved to be frightened," she added; "for my mother told me not to go out alone."

"She was right. Is that your house?"

"Yes, that is it. Thank you for coming so far with me; but I need not take you any farther out of your way."

"I will walk with you to the foot of the hill. After that you will not be likely to meet with any more adventures."

At the bottom of the hill Hetty stopped and held out her hand to the stranger. "I don't know how to thank you," she said, "I shall be grateful to you always for coming to my assistance so opportunely."

He bowed low over her hand without answering, and then, having watched her ride into the gate, he turned and walked quickly away in the opposite direction.

His quick steps soon slackened, and presently he sat, or rather dropped, down on the side of a steep kopje which commanded a view of the hundreds of tents clustered over the ridge. But he did not look at the busy, and in many respects unique, scene presented to his gaze. He closed his eyes and pressed his hand to his side, while great drops gathered on his brow, and a terrible fit of coughing seized him. After a time it passed over, his face grew less death-like, and he threw himself down on the grass and gasped for breath.

"This grows worse," he muttered. "It will finish me before long if I don't take care. If I could only get rid of this infernal pain I could stand the cough, though it is playing the mischief with me. I wonder if it would be worth while to consult a doctor—crew of shams and swindlers that they are? I must do something to stop this, it has caused me to waste the whole day, though to be sure, if it had not been for that I shouldn't have been there to help that little girl. I wonder who she is; she seems a nice little thing, there is the ring of the true gold about her. It is something new to meet a natural, unaffected woman, especially a young and uncommonly pretty one who seems unconscious of her charms. But perhaps she was not so innocent as she appeared. Very likely she was thinking all the time of the effect she was producing with those seemingly candid, frank, brown eyes. I never knew but one who was as good and true as she was beautiful. Oh! my Laurie, there are not many like you," and, taking from his pocket a card wrapped in silver paper, he gazed long and

earnestly into the lovely pictured face, his stern eyes softening strangely as he gazed. He passed his fingers tenderly over it, and pressed it to his lips. "My darling," he murmured, "my snowdrop, my lily. Oh! my Laurie, why had it to be thus? you lying in that lonely graveyard, and I here?"

Then replacing the photograph in his pocket, he rose and descended the kopje with a slow, halting step, which told of both mental and physical weariness.

It was dark when he reached his home—a prospector's tent at a long distance from the camp. He struck a light and looked eagerly around, then he caught sight of that for which he sought—a letter pinned against the side of the tent—and tearing it open, ran his eye hastily over its contents. It evidently contained good news, for his dark face lighted up with a gleam of triumph.

"It is as I expected," he said. "I shall be a rich man yet, and that before long. Yes, I shall have wealth. It is all I have to live for now; ah, well, it is what most men live for after all."

Very glad, and much relieved felt Hetty when she rode in at the little gate and gave Tommy into old Pambani's charge.

"Well, Hetty, safe home again?" called her mother from the window.

"Yes mother, this time; but I'll never go alone again. You were right as usual, mother; I should not have gone. I have had a very unpleasant adventure."

"My dear child, what has happened?" asked her mother anxiously.

And Hetty told her story, interrupted often by exclamations and fervent ejaculations from Alette.

"My dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Brown, taking the girl's hands in hers, which trembled more than Hetty's had done when the Zulu seized her bridle, "I knew it was not safe for you to go alone; you must never do so again. Thank heaven that gentleman was at hand! Your father must find out where he lives and thank him. Does he live in the camp?"

"He did not say, and I did not ask him. Mother, you will think I am very ungrateful, but I was by no means pleasantly impressed by the man, for all I owe so much to him. I shouldn't think it necessary for father to go and thank him, as he said any one else would have done the same."

"Doubtless; but it would only be nice to go and thank him, even if not exactly necessary. But what was there about the man that you didn't like? I thought you said he was a gentleman."

"So he is, I suppose; but he had not at all a nice manner. He spoke to me as if I had been a naughty child, and he has the hardest, sternest eyes I ever saw in my life."

"So you were a naughty child to go out alone against my advice," said her mother, smiling fondly at her, nevertheless. "I should scold you myself if it were not that I am so glad to have you safe back again."

"Yes, but you see, he didn't know that till afterwards, so he had no right to speak so. But I am ungrateful," she added self-reproachfully, "for I never was so glad to see any one in all my life, and the sound of the sjambok on that man's head and shoulders was the most musical sound I ever heard."

After that day Hetty never rode out unless accompanied by her father or Oswald, and as Mr. Brown spent most of his time in the camp, and Oswald generally accompanied him, she had few opportunities of gratifying her love of riding. So she spent hours practising on the sweet-toned piano the songs her father and mother loved, or studying, and directing Oswald's studies when he was at home. She also availed herself delightedly of the permission Mr. Vere had given her father to make use of his library, and almost any afternoon, when, as often happened, the weather was too cold and blustering for such a sunshine-loving creature to venture outside, she might have been found sitting in the window-seat of her bright little parlour, poring over the pages of some book culled from the shelves inside. Volumes of history, poetry, travels and romance were read while her mother sat sewing by the fire, and the wind howled about the old house, and the sand and pebbles rattled against the window-panes and made dismal music there.

Walks, too, Hetty took after a time, when the nervousness caused by her unlucky ride had passed away. Never very far, and never without making silent comparisons between her own beautiful home and the stern, rugged hills and rocky valleys of Klipkopjes, very much to the disadvantage of the latter; but always finding a charm in the very difference she deplored. Mrs. Brown was a poor walker, and Alette was Hetty's almost invariable companion in these rambles. The poor Hottentot girl missed her former home

and friends as much as Hetty did, and she was far more dull and lonely than it was possible for her bright young mistress ever to feel; and when her work, which was little and easy, was done, she felt the time hang heavy on her little, yellow hands. Hetty, pitying the girl's loneliness, endeavoured to make the time pass pleasantly for her, so she never started on one of her rambles, or "kopje scrambles" as she called them, without first putting her head in at the kitchen door and inviting Alette to accompany her. The invitation was never refused, and Hetty soon succeeded in making her as interested as she was herself in the many odd and beautiful little plants and flowers that nestled among the lichened rocks on the grey kopjes. In the side of the highest kopje, which towered up directly in front of the house, was Hetty's favourite spot, which she called the "quartz cave." It was not a cave properly speaking, but merely a deep hollow, which had been worn by some impetuous summer torrent between the rock that rose up on both sides and almost met overhead. The earth had been washed away, leaving only enough in the crevices of the rocks to afford a scanty sustenance to a few stunted ferns and brownish mosses. The rocks which formed the walls were of pure white or greyish quartz, covered by bright yellow, dull red, and vermillion-coloured lichens, and in this wild, bright spot Hetty spent much of her time, while the Hottentot girl reclined at her feet, making herself comfortable—as her luxurious, ease-loving race know so well how to do, if they have but leisure and opportunity. Here Hetty would read and explain, to the best of her ability, passages and chapters from her little Testament, and relate lively, interesting stories such as were suited to the dark girl's comprehension. Thus, quietly and uneventfully, but on the whole very pleasantly, passed the first few months on the Witwatersrandt Gold Fields. Mr. Brown was very sanguine of being able to pay off all his debts before long; he was discovering, to his own surprise, that he was a far better business-man than he had ever been a farmer, and the vision he had had of a simple little home wherein to live until he should have made money enough to buy back the old colonial farm was growing fainter; and larger hopes and ambitions took the place of the former humble ones, as success looked more and more certain. The town grew rapidly, and the lots he had purchased increased in value every week. He made other investments, also, which proved even more profitable, and before he had been

three months at the Randt he had realised his hopes so far as to be able to send a large remittance to his principal creditor.

Very pleasant were the evenings, when, after tea, they all assembled in the little parlour to which every week added something fresh of beauty or comfort of Mrs. Brown's or Hetty's devising. A bright fire glowed in the fire-place, and before this Mrs. Brown generally sat with her book or her work, while Hetty played, and her father and Oswald sang the sweet old-fashioned tunes which they had learned and loved "at home," as they always affectionately spoke of the Colony, though they were beginning to feel less and less like exiles. One evening Mrs. Brown and Hetty sat alone, Oswald was studying in his room, and Mr. Brown, being unusually tired, had retired early.

"There," exclaimed Hetty, shutting up her book, "I have finished the first volume; I really must get the second and see how that begins."

"Is it not too late?" asked her mother. "You know you have sat up until twelve two nights this week, and I can't allow that to happen often. There is nothing more ruinous to the health than late hours."

"I know, mother, but its quite early, not half past nine yet, and I don't believe I should sleep a wink if I went to bed without beginning that second volume. This book leaves my poor travellers in such sad difficulties that it would be positively heartless to go to bed without seeing them out of some of them."

"Very well; but you must not get into the way of keeping late hours, it is a vice we were never guilty of at home, and I have always been glad of it."

Hetty stepped across the little passage which separated their parlour from Mr. Vere's rooms. The room was locked, but the key was in the door, and she was about to turn it when a sound broke upon her ear, or rather a succession of sounds, low and indistinct at first, but growing each moment louder and clearer, and gradually resolving themselves into the deep soft notes of an organ. Hetty stood still, with her hand on the key, her second volume forgotten, everything forgotten, in admiration of the glorious melody which rose and sank and vibrated mournfully through the air like the very spirit of melancholy. Presently a voice joined in with the music—a wonderful voice, rich, highly cultivated and full of pathos: such a voice as Hetty had never heard

before, and the deep sadness of it filled her eyes with a rush of sympathetic tears.

The music ceased and then began again without the grand accompanying voice. Hetty stepped back across the passage.

"Mother," she called softly, "come here;" and the two stood listening in silence until the music died away once more.

"Is it not exquisite?" breathed Hetty rapturously. "Mother, who can it be?"

"Why it must be Mr. Vere. I suppose he has returned. Yes, I see a light burning in the stable, and I know Pambani put his out long ago."

"Well, if he often gives us a treat like this I shall be glad that he has come home. Oh, there, he has closed the organ. I suppose the entertainment is over for to-night, and I must go to bed without my second volume after all; but never mind, this has been much better."

CHAPTER XXV.

PREACHING PATIENCE.

A COOL, starry, moonlight night, had succeeded to the long hot day. It was late, but still Kathie and Pearl sat working in their tent. The flaps were stretched wide open to let in the cool air; and the moonlight poured in broad silver streams across the floor. But the breeze, and the moonbeams were not the only visitors that found admission; there were other, and less welcome ones. Large black and yellow beetles extremely active and energetic, came tumbling in at the door, and scampered across the floor, swarms of bright winged beetles came in and buzzed around the flickering candle, and flew with a whirr and a flap into the eyes of the workers, little, green, uncanny mantises glided about like small spirits of evil, slapping with their little, malicious hands at whatever came in their way, while a cloud of moths fluttered round the candle, where every now and then one of their number met with an untimely death.

"Oh, what miserable little plagues they are," exclaimed Pearl, waving about her head the stocking she was darning, to put to flight the little creatures which buzzed about her and crawled into her hair. "Kathie, we shall have to close the tent and put out the light. Just look at these insects; there are no less than ten of those horrid, little red beetles in your hair."

"I don't mind them; and we might as well finish the darning before we go to bed. Let us be thankful that they are not the ants or mosquitoes we had last week."

"And because we had something much worse last week must I be glad that we have these to-night?"

Poor Pearl, she was in an impatient mood, she was tired, she hated darning of all things, and the long hot day had tried her sadly. She had never been strong, and she found the hot summer months especially wearisome.

"Not glad, only patient," Kathie replied, in answer to the question.

"Patient," Pearl repeated scornfully; "I'm not patient, and I never shall be; and as to being glad, I should like to know what there is to be glad about."

"Well, we have one or two things to be glad of. Think how ill Clive was last week, and how much better he is now, and think what terrible storms we had every night last week, and what pleasant weather we are having now; is not that something to be glad of?"

"It might be if you were sure they would last; but they will not. Clive may be ill again next week for all you know, and it may be stormy again to-morrow; most likely it will."

"And because we may have something worse again to-morrow or next week, we are not to be glad and thankful for what we have now that is good and pleasant?" Kathie rejoined, smiling and mincing her tone.

"It is all very well to talk so," Pearl answered, "but it doesn't make a bit of difference, really, and I know you don't feel cheerful and hopeful, no matter how you talk; you only do it because you think it is right, and your duty, and all that. I don't mean that people ought to grumble when things are going pleasantly because they may not always go so; but how often do they go pleasantly or smoothly with us? Aren't things always going wrong, and doesn't every month we stay here make them worse? The boys never were strong, and they are growing more and more delicate, at least Clive is; and how can he grow strong when we can't get medicine for him or proper food, and when he sleeps in wet blankets two nights out of every three? Is there anything in that to feel thankful for?"

"Perhaps not; at any rate, Pearl, there is great need for patience. 'If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small.'" Kathie's voice was low and her eyes full of tears

as she looked at Pearl's thin flushed face, and noted the nervous trembling of the slight brown hand that plied the darning needle, and she felt how hard it was not to faint and give up utterly when every day increased the mental and physical strain and made them less able to cope with increasing anxieties and cares. If Kathie's feet had not been planted on the Rock of Ages, if she had not known where to go for help and strength, she certainly would have fainted, and she would have found it impossible to keep up even the semblance of hope and cheerfulness which made the darkest days less dark than they would otherwise have been.

Kathie was learning, and learning well and thoroughly, many of life's most valuable, and at the same time hardest, lessons. She was learning to be patient, to believe that when the clouds of doubt, fear, and perplexity were darkest around her, that the light was shining, though she could not see it; in short she was learning to "suffer and be strong." Pearl took the hardships more hardly, and learned the lesson more slowly. But she was learning it, too, though she hardly knew it herself. She never permitted her weary harassed father to see the cloud on her brow, because she knew how it would pain him; a desponding or cross word she never spoke to her little brothers. It was only when alone with Kathie, as to-night, that she allowed her fears, anxieties, and impatience to find utterance. "My strength *is* small," she said, in reply to Kathie's last words, "and my hope is small, and my faith is small, and growing smaller every day. We shall stay in Hebron till we starve."

"No, we shall not starve, Pearl. I have no such fear. A way will be opened for us."

"I don't believe it will. We can't go on without money, and where is the money to come from? We have none left in Cape Town. Besides, papa will not believe that it is useless to stay here; he is as firmly convinced as ever that Gerald will come to us here if we only stay long enough. Oh! Kathie, how could Gerald be so sinful—so wicked as to do what he did?"

"Hush, Pearl! do not let you and I say hard things of Gerald. Papa, who has far more to bear than we have, never does. Poor Gerald!" and Kathie sighed as she filled her needle with another long thread.

"I wish we could go to Johannesburg," Pearl went on, after a while. "It is growing to be such a fine, wealthy flourishing place."

"So do I, especially as Lena is going to live there after her marriage; but it might not be wise to go there, Pearl, even if we could, for it is not healthy, there is a great deal of fever there now, and we should always be anxious on papa's account. He is not nearly so strong as when we first came here, though he will not confess it, and works harder than ever. The last few months have tried him sadly."

"I know they have, and he will never be well as long as we stay here. With the work, the coarse food, and the constant exposure to cold and wet, how can he keep well? We hoped that when the winter was over things would be better. Well, the winter is over, and the summer is half over too, yet everything is worse than ever, and I know it will continue to get worse. Kathie, I am afraid to stay here. I feel sometimes as if I can't bear any more of it—as if I must just fly away and be done with it all."

"I know how you feel," said Kathie, putting her arm with the long black stocking still upon it round her sister's neck. "I feel so, too, sometimes; but we must not encourage the repining and despondent thoughts, Pearl; we must try and be brave and bear it patiently, and we have the promise that nothing but good shall happen to them that fear Him."

Pearl's face brightened and softened for a moment, but presently she resumed—

"I wish papa had been willing to let me try and get a situation as governess. I might have helped a little in that way, and at any rate it would have been one expense the less."

"It would make no real difference to the expenses, and I should be as unwilling as papa to let you go. It is my duty to go, if one of us should. I am the elder. I have spoken to papa several times on the subject, but the last time I mentioned it to him he looked so pained, and spoke so decidedly against it, that I resolved to give up the idea unless the worst comes to the worst, for I know that nothing would grieve him so much as for one of us to do anything of the kind."

"I suppose so," said Pearl, rather unwillingly. "Has papa quite decided to go to this 'new rush' that everyone is talking of?"

"Yes; he said to-night that if he continued to hear good accounts of it all the week we had better move out there at the beginning of next."

"Oh, we are all to go then?"

"Yes, and I am very glad; it is much better than papa's going alone, he was so uncomfortable the last time he went by himself. I think a little change will be good for us, Pearl, in spite of the inconvenience of moving and the additional work we shall have."

"I hope so," said Pearl, "it is time something did us good. I am well enough, but you never rest from one week's end to another. You are either cooking, sewing, or teaching all the time, and when you are not doing any of those things you are studying. Lena says you do too much, and I am sure you do. Mr. Chips says this new rush is a pretty place, Kathie; suppose when we get there we take a holiday; do a little pleasant reading and give up sewing, and patching and darning, and all the rest of it for a while?"

"I am very willing," replied Kathie, glad to see a brighter look taking the place of the hopeless, worried look on Pearl's face. "As soon as we get there and are 'fixed up,' as Mr. Chips would say, we will take a little rest and enjoy ourselves. I have finished all the stockings, Pearl; give me one of those."

"No; they are all done except this one I am working at, and it will be finished directly."

"Never mind, give it to me and I will finish it while you read our chapter."

It had been for some time their custom to read together a chpater of the Bible before retiring for the night, and the Divine words of strength and wisdom soothed and rested them after the trials of the day as nothing else could have done, and neither would have missed the reading for the world. It was a fountain in which they washed away the memory of the weariness and disappointments of the day, and gained strength and courage to meet those of the next.

The chapter for this evening was the Thirty-fourth Psalm, and the words came with peculiar force and meaning to their hearts after the talk they had just been having, some of the verses especially, and Pearl read them over slowly and distinctly—"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." . . . "The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

"We need not be afraid after these words, need we?" said Kathie.

"No; if we could only keep them in our minds always."

"And not forget, as we so often do, that He never promises what He will not perform."

Then they knelt side by side and prayed to Him whose ears are always open to the prayers of the weak and those who have no other helper. They prayed for their father, who was ill and troubled about so many things; for the little brothers; for each other; and for the one who was absent they knew not where; prayed that he might be restored to them, or, if that might not be, that they might all be united at last in that home where there is no more parting, and where sorrow and sighing shall be done away.

More than nine months have passed since they had visited Mrs. De Beer in Kimberley, and Kathie had turned her pearl necklace into money to buy warm garments for the winter. The winter months, which were fully as cold and uncomfortable as Kathie had anticipated, passed drearily away, brightened by one or two flying visits from Ambie, and by friendly intercourse with Lena and Gabriel Bernhardt.

Few, very few diamonds had been found, and Mr. Milner's eyes were gradually opening to the fact that his agent at Cape Town was mismanaging his affairs, if not acting very dishonestly, for money only came after he had sent several times for it, and generally only half the amount for which he sent; accompanied by some more or less incomprehensible excuse from Mr. Durwood for not having sent the whole amount. Consequently, in the cold weather, when they needed more comforts, they had less than even before. They grew accustomed to breakfasts of dry bread, coarse meal porridge, and coffee sweetened with dark sugar, to cold dinners and scanty suppers; and Kathie often asked herself, as she looked at the table, seldom graced by a cloth nowadays, because "washing cost so much," if she were she, and if this was the same world she had lived in years ago. The bare table, with its plate of brown bread, and its row of common delf cups and battered coffee pot, often brought a rush of tears into her eyes, not so much because of the actual want, as because of the other want of which it spoke so plainly. It told how times and things had changed in a way it was very hard to listen to, and a vision of the bright little breakfast-room at Beechwood would rise up before her, with its warm rich carpets and curtains, its glowing fire and its breakfast table, bright with snowy mapery, silver, china and flowers. How far in the past were the old happy days,

and the old home whose solid comforts she had never valued nor truly appreciated until they were gone for ever!

The winter had passed, and the spring and the summer had come again, and there seemed less hope than ever of their leaving Hebron before they were utterly ruined in health and finances. Mr. Milner had now no more money in Cape Town, except such as might be realized by the sale of Mosswood, but though he tried still to hope against hope that he would find a fortune in the diggings, and that Gerald would eventually join him there, he was very unwilling to part with the only home they had in the world.

The rent had hitherto brought him in a certain sum every month, but since the beginning of the winter the house had stood empty, and, though repeatedly urged, the agent had been unable to find tenants for it, or would not exert himself to do so. It may be imagined, therefore, that the fortunes of the Milners were at a very low ebb.

Several diggers who had been prospecting on some kopjes a few miles from Hebron had within the last few weeks found two or three valuable diamonds; the news of their finds spread rapidly, and the place was accordingly "rushed," and Mr. Milner decided to "trek" there also and try his luck. He had tried his luck at a good many "new rushes" during the past few months, and the luck had never turned his way; yet, though he had not much hope that it would do so on this occasion, he nevertheless resolved to go to the kopjes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"IS HE MY BROTHER?"

A DAY or two before they left Natal Kopje, Pearl, with a roll of music in her hand, entered Lena's little parlour. The piano was open, and she seated herself before it and began diligently to practice. It was a bright afternoon, the sun poured into the room, and Lena's canary (whose cage hung outside the window) trilled a jubilant accompaniment to the music, in which the river and the crickets also joined. Lena herself was busy in the kitchen, from which a pleasant smell of hot biscuits came every time she opened the door to bring in a fresh supply of chopped vaal-bush roots for her fire. When Pearl struck the first notes she put her head in at the

door and nodded her a bright "good afternoon," and then went back to her work.

That kitchen might have served as an index to the character of its blithe, busy mistress; everything was in order, everything was clean, everything was bright. The walls which were made of pieces of tin and the insides of zinc-lined cases were guiltless of dust or cobwebs, the only stains they bore were the long, wavy, rusty lines where the water ran down on rainy days. The floor was swept as clean as a broom could sweep it, the little stove in the corner was brightly polished, and the deal table, which stood under the single pane of glass that served for a window, was spotless.

Presently the biscuits reached the exact shade of brownness and the precise degree of crispness necessary to perfection, and Lena turned them out upon the table, and tucked a white cloth around them. Then she proceeded to put tea into a little brown teapot and pour upon it water from the bubbling, hissing kettle on the stove. This done, she put two cups and saucers, a little packet of sugar, a small bottle of milk, and a portion of her biscuits, into a basket; then she poured out a cup of tea and carried it with a plate of her hot, spicy cake to Pearl.

"How beautifully you play," she said, after pausing at the door for a few moments to listen. "You have quite surpassed your mistresses, Kathie and me."

"Oh, Lena, how can you say so? you know I have *not* surpassed *you*. I shall never play as well as you do."

"You play quite as well now, and you would soon play better if you had more time to devote to it. I think you do wonders practising only one hour a day, as you do, and often not so long, Now I must go and take Gabriel his tea. I have brought you a cup. I will put it here on the table beside you."

"Thank you; but why did you trouble to bring me tea, Lena? I do not want any."

"Yes you do, after your long, hot walk; and you must stop playing and try my biscuits while they are hot. You know nothing offends me like having my cookery despised. Mrs. Bain says I am ridiculously conceited about my cooking."

"Mrs. Bain is——well, I suppose I mustn't; but there is no danger of my despising your biscuits, I have not yet lost my childish love for hot, sweet cake."

Lena took up her basket and tripped away, and Pearl

watched her affectionately until the smooth dark head and flopping straw hat had disappeared around the corner; then she took up her cup and began abstractedly sipping her tea and looking out of the window at the glittering yellow river. When she had finished, she took her cup and plate back into the kitchen and filled the stove with roots, that Lena might not find her fire dead when she returned; then she went back and practised diligently, first of all the scales and exercises that Lena had set for her; then she sang song after song so sweetly and clearly that the canary, quite ashamed of the feeble little notes which issued from his feathered throat, relapsed into a gloomy silence, after expressing his dissatisfaction by a few short discontented chirps. Pearl did not generally practise for so long, but to-day she knew there was not much to do at home, and besides, this was the last time she would be able to practise for long, for Lena and Gabriel were not going to move to the "new rush." How Pearl wished that her father had not decided to go, either; not only because she would have no opportunity of practising, but because she did not like the prospect of being parted from Lena for weeks, perhaps months; and they would not have Lena with them very much longer now, for in a short time she was to be married to the young clergyman to whom she had been for several years engaged. Pearl thought sadly of how they would miss her when she was gone altogether. She had been such a kind friend, such a good counsellor, her warm sympathy had lightened many a trouble and deepened many a joy since they had known her. She and Kathie would have been lonely indeed if it had not been for Lena.

Lena had a long walk to her brother's claim, and it was late when she returned.

"How long you have been," exclaimed Pearl, when she came in.

"Yes, haven't I? Gabriel is digging on Hebron Kopje now, and he was away when I got there, and I had to wait for him. Have you had a good practice?"

"Very good; my last."

"Why your last? Can't you come again?"

"I don't think so. We go on Friday, and there is a good deal to do."

"I am so sorry you are going, Pearl."

"So am I; we shall miss you so much, Lena."

"And I shall miss you and Kathie sadly. But never

mind, she added cheerfully, it will not be for long, for if the place turns out well Gabriel and I will go there, and if it doesn't you will soon come back again."

"I hope it will turn out well," said Pearl soberly.

"I hope it may——"

"But you do not think that it will, Lena?"

"I am afraid not. I have seen so many of these new rushes, and they have always in the end proved to be what the diggers call 'fools' rushes.' But this place may turn out better than the others have done. I hope so, for your sake. At any rate they say it is pretty and grassy there, and it will be a pleasant change from the heat and glare of the kopjes here."

"Yes, it will. Kathie and I have been planning to enjoy ourselves when we get there, and have a real holiday."

"I am very glad; I am sure you need one. You have been having a weary time lately with Clive ill and your father so much away."

"Yes, we have, and we have decided to take a rest, and give up sewing and studying, and have some really pleasant reading instead."

"That's right. Have you plenty of books?"

"Well, not exactly plenty. Ambie's last supply is nearly exhausted, but we have still a few that we have not read, and a few that will bear reading over again."

"Come and look here. Here is a box of books that Gabriel bought at a sale the last time he was in Kimberley. I haven't looked at them yet, but we may find something among them worth reading;" and bringing a hammer from the kitchen, she proceeded to knock off the top of a small packing-case. A dusty oilcloth was on the top, which, on being removed, disclosed to view a number of books of all sizes and colours in a tolerable state of preservation.

"Here's 'Ouida' to begin with," said Lena, taking out two from the top. "You don't care about her, I suppose?"

"No, indeed; and I am sure Kathie would burn it if I took them home."

"I hope they are not all of the same description. Oh, no, here is George Eliot—all her works, I believe. You have not read them all."

"Not nearly. I have read 'Romola,' 'The Mill on the Floss,' and 'Middlemarch,' but I have not read 'Silas Marner'; I will take that if I may."

"Certainly; and here are some books of travel—Hum-

boldt, Schwinfurth, and some others;—oh, and here is Stanley's 'Through the Dark Continent.' You are a great admirer of Stanley, I believe?"

"Oh, yes; and I have never read these,' exclaimed Pearl ecstatically, clasping the two big dusty volumes in her arms: "These will be quite enough, Lena—Stanley and 'Silas Marner.'"

"You had better take some more. You can't have too much of a good thing, you know. Do you like Thackeray?"

"No, not much. Kathie does."

"Take these for Kathie, then; and here are somebody's Gems of English and American Poetry'; take them too. Don't I hear horses' hoofs, Pearl?"

"Yes; Mr. Parkins has just ridden up to the door."

Lena opened the door to admit the young gentleman, who, very spruce, very immaculate, and wearing a large bunch of scarlet geraniums in his hat, and another in his spotless white jacket, stood on the doorstep. He bowed low to Miss Bernhardt, and still lower to Pearl, of whom he caught sight before she had time to retreat to the kitchen, where she had intended to take refuge until his visit should be over. She had the most intense dislike of Mr. Parkins and his flowery, florid style of conversation.

"Ah, Miss Milner, happy to meet you. It is a long time since I had the—a—pleasure of seeing you down town."

"It is a long time since I was down town."

"Oh, yes, I suppose your domestic tasks and your studies occupy a great portion of your time," he said with a would-be sympathetic glance which made Pearl furious, "and you have little leisure for pleasures of any kind."

"And you think I could not find pleasure in my 'domestic tasks or my studies'?"

"No, they come more under the head of duties, I should say."

"And is it impossible for people to find their pleasure in their duty?"

"Not impossible, but it is—a—unusual, I should say. Such at least has been my experience. Has your brother returned yet, Miss Bernhardt? I came for the papers he promised to let me have."

"No, he has not come in yet, but I can get you the papers; they are all ready for you."

"Pray do not put yourself to any trouble. I can wait till Bernhardt comes in. My time is my own to-day."

But Lena declared that it would be no trouble, and she hurried away to look for the papers.

"Your sister is well, I—is enjoying good health, I hope," he began when Lena had left the room.

"She is quite well, thank you."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I thought she was looking very del—fragile, the last time I saw her. It was on the Sunday that Mr. B— from Kimberley preached here. Was she ill that morning?"

"I do not remember, I am sure," replied Pearl shortly. "She is as well as usual now, thank you."

But a short answer never stopped Mr. Parkins when he was disposed for conversation, and he resumed, with a glance at the big books she still held in her hands, "Those are two ponderous looking volumes, Miss Milner, what may they be?"

"These? H. M. Stanley's 'Through the Dark Continent.'"

"Oh, do you like his works?"

"Very much indeed."

"I do not. I shouldn't dislike them if I could believe in them; but he draws the long bow a little too much to please me," and Mr. Parkins drew himself up, sniffed at his geraniums, and looked very virtuous.

"You do not mean to say," began Pearl, her cheeks flushing and her eyes flashing in defence of her favourite hero, "You do not mean to say that he would write what was not true?"

"Yes, I do. You see he writes the account of his own sayings and doings, and, of course, he takes every opportunity of putting himself in the best light, and cracking himself up, and all that kind of thing; nothing more natural."

"Natural to some people, perhaps," said Pearl.

"All those American fellows know how to draw the long bow," continued Mr. Parkins, without noticing the interruption; "especially those newspaper chaps; it's their business, and this Stanley is no better than the rest."

Pearl did not answer: perhaps she was too angry, perhaps she did not deem the foe worthy of her steel; at any rate she remained silent turning over the pages of her book slowly.

"I daresay," went on Mr. Parkins presently, "I daresay now, that you're surprised to hear me express such an un-

flattering opinion of a fellow whom most people think it necessary to laud up to the skies, but I don't borrow my opinions from others, I form my own," and the young gentleman folded his arms, leaned back in his chair, and looked as if he were quite convinced that Alf Parkins, Esquire, as he was fond of styling himself, was a person of very superior intellect, and of very broad and enlightened views into the bargain. "My opinions are my own," he repeated emphatically.

"And they do you credit," Pearl was almost tempted to reply; but restrained herself and said instead, "I am not at all surprised at your opinion of Mr. Stanley."

"No? now I thought you would have been. You see it's not the common opinion."

"Oh!" replied Pearl slightingly. "I think it is common enough to hear the actions of great men cavilled at, their words sneered at, and their motives misconstrued by those who are incapable of appreciating their self-devotion and heroism; very common indeed."

"You have quite misunderstood my meaning, Miss Milner, I assure you, said Mr. Parkins quickly, "I'm no more incapable of appreciating heroism than anyone else, only that I'm not always ready to believe it exists."

"Exactly," said Pearl coolly, with a slight, irrepressible smile, which went farther towards disturbing Mr. Parkins' self-complacency than a dozen contemptuous speeches. He was casting about in his mind for a reply which should convince Pearl that he was not only able to appreciate heroism in others, but quite capable of doing heroic deeds himself, when Lena reappeared with the papers in her hand and put an end to the unprofitable conversation.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, Mr. Parkins," she said. "I thought I knew exactly where to lay my hand upon the papers, but I found they were mislaid."

He rose and took them from her with elaborately-expressed regrets at having put Miss Bernhardt to so much trouble, and with many bows and apologies he took himself off. He returned, however, in a few minutes to inquire if Lena could tell him whether a certain Mr. Wood, who had worked a claim near her brother's, was gone or going to the "rush."

"I do not know," replied Lena. "I have not seen him for several weeks. I think I heard that he was ill."

"Been taking too much brandy, I suppose," said Mr.

Parkins coarsely. "I don't know how it is, those fellows who never find anything and can never manage to pay their accounts at the store, always seem to find money enough to buy brandy with."

"Does Mr. Wood drink?" asked Lena in a surprised tone. "I never heard of it before."

"Oh, yes, he drinks; not often, I believe, but still he takes too much occasionally, and I suppose that's what's up with him now, if they say he's ill."

"He is very unlucky," said Lena.

"Oh, very; most unlucky dog I ever knew. Never finds, positively never. And yet Mr. Worth let's him run an account at our store. *I* wouldn't, I know. But the fact is, Mr. Worth's too soft; I'm always telling him so. He'll be let in for a fine thing one of these days if he doesn't look out."

"He will not lose by being kind-hearted," said Lena.

Mr. Parkins bowed and smiled in a superior way. "That's quite a young lady's view of the case," he said suavely. "But it's not a business view, Miss Bernhardt; and if Worth continues to let everyone have the run of his store, whether they have the money to pay him or not, he will lose, and pretty steeply too. I wouldn't have him hard on anyone, of course; there's nothing I hate like hard-heartedness, but business is business, you know; and if people haven't money to pay for things they should go without them; that's only fair. And so you can't tell me where I'm likely to find that fellow Wood, Miss Bernhardt?"

"No, Mr. Parkins, I really cannot."

"I suppose he has cleared out," muttered Mr. Parkins to himself as he mounted his horse once more; "and I'll have to ride out to that 'new rush' and hunt him up."

Pearl drew a breath of relief when once he was fairly out of sight.

"What an unpleasant creature he is," she exclaimed. "One might forgive his conceit if he were not so selfish, and his selfishness if he were not so conceited; and perhaps one might forgive both if he were a little less pompous and obtuse, but the combination is really too much for my nerves."

"He does make himself very absurd," said Lena.

"And he is so utterly heartless and soulless, too," Pearl continued disgustedly. "He cares for nothing but the

effect he is producing. Depend upon it, Lena, people who have those steely eyes which are neither green nor grey, but a mixture of both in which the green predominates, are always selfish and cold hearted, I have noticed it often."

"Your experience has been somewhat limited, has it not dear?"

"Perhaps it has; but I know that that is true. I never believe in people with that coloured eye. But if you want any proof that what I say of Mr. Parkins is true, you have only to shake hands with him. The way he takes one's hand and lets it drop again always makes me shiver; I feel as if a snake or a toad or some chilly reptile had touched me—you need not laugh, Lena, it is true."

Lena did laugh at her face of disgust, but she added gravely, "Pearl, Pearl, you are too bad. Remember the 'charity that thinketh no evil.'"

"I daresay I deserve that rebuke," said Pearl. "I suppose I am uncharitable; Kathie tells me so sometimes; but how can one always think and speak kindly of everyone?"

"There is but one way, Pearl, and you know it as well as I can tell you. I do not think you are uncharitable. I know your dislike arises from a contempt of what is insincere and selfish; but we must try, you know, while despising the sin not to despise the sinner. I wonder," she added suddenly, "if that young Wood really drinks; I should not have believed it."

"Who is he?" asked Pearl. "I have never heard of him before."

"He is a young fellow who came a few months ago from Gong Gong. He has been very unlucky; and he works so hard, too! I have often seen him babying and digging by moonlight. But you must have seen him, Pearl."

"No; I don't think I've ever heard his name before. I am sure I have not."

"He is very different from the ordinary run of diggers, and he avoids all intercourse with them. Gabriel, feeling sorry for his loneliness, has tried several times to 'make friends' as the children say, but his advances have been very coldly received. Mr. Wood is, without doubt, a gentleman, and evidently been accustomed to a position very different from the one he now occupies.

"Where does he work now," Pearl asked, striving to conceal under an appearance of indifference her sudden, deep interest in the subject; for a suspicion had flashed into her

mind that this lonely, unfortunate young diamond digger was her long lost brother Gerald.

"I think he is working at Hebron Kopje now," replied Lena.

"And what is he like—his face, I mean?"

Lena smiled. "You are not trying to weave a romance out of what I have been telling you, are you?" she asked. "If you are you will be glad to hear that he is very handsome, that is, he would be if he were not so terribly emaciated and had not such a hard, defiant expression; he has magnificent eyes."

"It must be Gerald," Pearl repeated to herself over and over again as she walked home. "Young, handsome, gentlemanly, and studiously avoiding all intercourse with the other diggers. It must be. I will take the earliest opportunity of visiting Hebron Kopje, and meanwhile I will say nothing to papa or Kathie until I have proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is he; it would only raise a hope that might be disappointed, and they have enough to bear. Should I be sure of knowing him if I met him? I think so; but it is years since I saw him, and I have not even seen a portrait of him since we left England. I think I should know Gerald, but it might be as well to refresh my memory. Kathie had a miniature of him painted on ivory; I wonder if she has it still. But I cannot ask her to let me see, she might suspect something, and she has enough to trouble her without suffering the disappointment of false hopes. I wonder if she keeps it in her desk. I must look sometime when she is out."

This opportunity came the next afternoon, when Kathie went to carry some tea to her father's claim. As soon as she was out of sight Pearl went to her desk. The key lay in the top, and Pearl slowly unlocked it. "I feel as if I were doing something dishonourable," she said to herself. "But I am not really, and I could not ask her for the miniature. I hope it is here."

But if it was there it was not easy to find. Pearl turned over the contents of the desk slowly and carefully. There were papers, envelopes, a few receipted bills of her father's, a bundle of old letters, most of them those she and the boys had written to Kathie while she was at school, a few loose Christmas cards and photos, a host of miscellaneous articles, but nothing in the least like her brother's portrait. Pearl was almost giving up in despair when she recollected the small secret drawers at the back of the desk.

"How could I have forgotten them?" she exclaimed, pressing the spring, which caused the wood to fall back and disclose the four tiny drawers. She opened the first—a little dust, a few English postage stamps, half a dozen yellow beech leaves—there was nothing else to reward her. The second was quite empty. The third contained a little jewellery, which on coming to Hebron, Kathie had consigned to obscurity.

"It is here or nowhere," exclaimed Pearl, pausing with her finger on the little brass knob of the fourth drawer. She was almost afraid to open it, lest she should meet with disappointment here also. But at last she drew it open, and the colour rushed to her cheeks as she saw laying on the very top a plain, rather large gold locket, one which Kathie had often worn long ago, but which Pearl had not seen for years. She opened it with fingers that trembled with suppressed excitement. A miniature was there certainly, but it was not the one she sought. The face which looked up at her from the small ivory oval was not in the least like Gerald's. It possessed none of the bright, sparkling beauty for which her unfortunate young brother had been remarkable. It was not without a certain beauty of its own for all that; the brow was broad and intellectual, the eyes large, black, and heavily lashed, the mouth firm and proud. It was altogether a strong, resolute face, the face of one who knew not the meaning of weakness or indecision. A casual observer might have called it cold and passionless, but a truer judge of character would have known that the man who possessed those dark, southern eyes, was far more likely to resemble the volcano than the iceberg.

Pearl gazed at the portrait for a long time, then fell to wondering whose it could be, and what right it had to a place in Kathie's locket. It was no one she had ever seen, of that Pearl was certain; she would not have forgotten that face if she had once seen it. It was too uncommon both in features and expression. It was no one they had met in Cape Town. Perhaps it was some friend of Ambie's whom Kathie had met at Ingleside. But that was too absurd—as if Kathie would wear it in her locket—the portrait of a mere chance acquaintance. No, it must be someone she knew very well and *liked very much*. This last thought came to Pearl with a sharp, jealous pang. Was it possible that there was someone for whom Kathie cared as much, perhaps more, than she did for her, and her father, and the boys? She had never before glanced at the

possibility of Kathie's admitting any one else to a share in her affections, and the thought was very disagreeable to her. That people could not help loving Kathie was natural enough, for was she not the dearest, best, and loveliest girl in all the world? Of course Ambie loved her, and she had guessed long ago what Kathie had never dreamed, that Gabriel Bernhardt cared more for her than for all the world besides. But that Kathie's heart should be won was a different matter; and yet what could she think but that this stranger had won it. Why otherwise would his portrait——. "But then," objected Pearl, "if she cared for anyone and was betrothed to him, surely she would have told me. Kathie would not have a secret from me." Then she caught sight of what she had not before noticed—the initials G. K., and a date, written in minute characters across one corner. "August, four years ago," she exclaimed. "Why, Kathie was at school then. It was just before Gerald——" but here Pearl paused, struck by a thought which brought a proud, angry flush to her face and a flash into her eyes. "I see it all," she said slowly, "he pretended to care for her, and when sorrow and trouble came to her, and dishonour and shame fell upon us, all his worthless love died. But surely, surely Kathie would not go on caring for a man so base and mean; surely she would forget that she ever had loved him, and despise him as he deserves? And yet," she continued, "if Kathie really had cared for him to begin with, she could not leave off caring because he proved himself unworthy. I don't think we Milners can change very easily; what we care for once, we care for always; though people do say that hazel eyes and fickle natures go together. But it is such a good face, such a frank, noble expression. Surely the owner of those eyes could never be mean or false? Perhaps they were engaged, and when all the trouble about Gerald came, Kathie gave him back his freedom and would not let him unite himself with one on whose name such shame had come. Yes, it must have been that way. But," with a sudden start of recollection, "what right have I to be wondering and speculating about the matter and trying to find out what Kathie has never chosen to tell me? I am sure I never meant to be inquisitive or prying, though if Kathie happened to come in now she could not but think me both;" and, closing the locket with a snap, she was just about to shut the drawer, but remembering the original object of her search, which, in her surprise at her unexpected discovery, she had forgotten, she hastily turned

over the contents of the little drawer and at the bottom found what she had come to seek—Gerald's portrait. Tears of sorrowful pity gathered in Pearl's eyes as she gazed at it. It brought back to her mind so clearly the gay handsome brother she had loved so dearly in the old childish days at Beechwood. What a bright face it was—so gay and frank and débonnaire. Alas, that look had left it long, she knew, however otherwise unchanged he was.

"Poor, poor Gerald," she murmured. "How does he bear it? How can he bear it?—exiled, disgraced, and separated from everyone he ever loved. Is it possible that he is here in Hebron, and that I shall see him soon—to-morrow, perhaps? But if he were here he would have been sure to hear of us; and could he have kept away from us? I don't think he could. He must know how papa longs and yearns for him. But it may be that he has never heard of us; there are many diggers here whose names I have never heard. No, he would not keep away from us if he knew, or else he is strangely altered—oh, I hope it is he. How nice it would be to have him with us again. I would give the whole world to see that cloud of sorrow removed from papa's brow, and see him look something like his old self again. I shall go to Hebron Kopje to-morrow; if it were not so late I would go now, but it *is* too late."

Pearl pressed the picture tenderly to her lips and put it away again, with a great, passionate longing to find her brother, and in some way indemnify him for all he had suffered.

The next day Pearl carried her father his tea, and afterwards, having sent Clive home with the teapot, she directed her steps towards Hebron Kopje. The day was quiet, so that walking over the heaps of stones and gravel was a less dusty and unpleasant business than usual. But it was very hot, and Pearl was tired and breathless before she was half way up the hill. Her heart was beating, too, with excitement, and she felt half afraid to go on. When she got nearly to the top she sat down on a great rock to rest, and to try and calm herself a little before going any further. What should she say to Gerald, she wondered, and what would he say to her? Would he know her? Most likely, for she was so much like Kathie. Would he come back with her at once, and if so what would her father and Kathie say? How much he would have to tell them and they him. But would it prove to be Gerald after all? Was she not preparing a very great and bitter disappointment

for herself? But at that possibility she would not glance, and getting up she hastened to the top of the kopje.

The reports of the good finds at the "new rush" had drawn most of the diggers away from the camp, but a goodly number still lingered on Hebron Kopje, and "babies" were being shaken vigorously: spades and shovels were going in every direction; some were sorting, and from every claim came the harsh tuneless song of the natives as they threw the gravel into the sieves, and gravitated it. It was a noisy, busy scene, and not without a certain element of picturesqueness. But Pearl was far too intent on the business she had in hand to think of or even notice that. On a great rock near Towser Chip's claim she sat down to take a survey. In the claim to the right of her were two men whom she had often seen before; in the one on the left were several natives, and one young man who was a stranger to her, but who one glance served to convince her was not he whom she sought; in another were three stout Dutchmen, in another Gabriel Bernhardt stood leaning on his "baby" and watching his boys; in another, twenty or thirty natives were working a machine; but there was no one there in the least resembling the gentlemanly young digger of whom Lena had spoken.

"He may be one of those at work down there," she said to herself. "But I can't go near enough to see. I will go over to Mr. Chips and ask him who everybody is; he will be able to tell me, and I won't go home without knowing whether Gerald really is here or not, of that I am determined"—and picking up her sunshade she walked over the intervening heaps and holes and presently electrified Chips by appearing at his side as he bent, sorter in hand, over his tub.

"Miss Pearl," he exclaimed, taking her hand in his great hearty grasp. "'Taint often anyone sees you up here. Come to see my diamond?"

"No. I did not know that you had found one. How big is it?"

"'Taint a bad size—five carats—but it's a ugly-coloured thing; I won't get above ten pounds for it. Have a look at it. But first let me fix you up a seat." And he piled up several sieves one on top of another, spread his jacket over the top, rolled up a grain-bag for a foot-stool, and invited her to be seated. "Has your father found anything to-day?" he asked, as she thanked him and took the seat.

"No, nothing at all."

"Humph, I guess he's got into a bad place again; though, to be sure, it's hard to tell where to find a good 'un. The diamonds aint gettin' any more plentifuller, I know."

"No, indeed, they are not. I wonder people stay here, those who could go away, I mean. Almost any place or any life would be preferable to this."

"It's a bad place for them that ain't been used to roughin' it," Chips answered, with a compassionate glance at the girl's delicate, tired face; "and it's a poor place for them that have, I find. I ain't going to stand much more of it; if I don't find something worth while before long I mean to clear. I suppose your father's waitin' for a big one. There's nothin' I'd like better to hear than that he'd got hold o' somethin' good."

"Thank you," said Pearl, with a little sigh, "but I don't think there's much probability of it."

"No, I'm afraid there ain't; big ones is few and far between, and so is the little ones too, for that matter. Mr. Milner ought to get somethin' worth havin' before he leaves the diggins; he's worked long enough, and hard enough too; he ought to get paid for his trouble. Old Dobbs found a diamond this mornin'—you know Old Dobbs, his claim's over there. He's a lucky old chap, don't find bad at all, considerin'. But he spends all his money on drink. That's the way things go in this world, them that don't deserve nothin' gets everything."

"And by the same rule, I suppose," said Pearl, laughing, "those who deserve everything get nothing."

"That's about it—good folks like you an' me, Miss Pearl. Did you hear that Roberts had gone?"

"No; where has he gone to?"

"Oh; to the new rush. But that fellow 'll never do no good nowhere. He was workin' here last week, just alongside o' me, and four days out of every week he was drunk."

"Where is Mr. Wood's claim?" Pearl asked.

"Mr. Wood! Do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him; but I have heard him spoken of as a very unlucky digger."

"Unlucky! You may say so. He doesn't make salt to his porridge, that fellow, let alone the porridge itself. Sometimes he works with one nigger to help him, or it may be two; but most of the time he works alone. I can't make out how he stands it—he ain't over strong."

"Do you know him?" Pearl asked, with an eagerness she could not conceal.

"Humph,—well, I can't say that I do; not what I call knowin', at any rate. I've spoken to him once or twice."

"What sort of a person is he?"

"He seems a quiet chap; and it's easy to see he's been used to a different sort of life from the one he's leadin' now. He's a bit haughty, too, and don't seem to have anythin' to do with other folks. He's awful hard up, I think, and I'm downright sorry for him, that's a fact."

"Which claim did you say was his?"

"I didn't say; but that's it over there;" and Chips pointed to a claim at some distance where the "baby" stood silent and the tubs deserted by all save a few donkeys. "He hasn't been here all the afternoon," continued Chips; "sick again, I shouldn't wonder. He won't thank them donkeys for drinkin' his water, I guess. I'll jest go and turn 'em away."

He departed on his goodnatured erand, leaving Pearl alone; and she was very glad of the opportunity thus afforded to wipe away unobserved the tears which the thought of her brother, alone and ill and in the depth of poverty, had brought into her eyes for that it was her brother; Pearl had now no doubt.

How unfortunate that he was away. She longed to go to him and tell him how dearly she loved him, how intensely she pitied him; to tell him also how near was the father who longed so to see him once more, and who had forgiven him so completely for all the suffering his rash act had entailed upon him. To-morrow they would leave for the "new rush," and Pearl felt that she could not go without seeing him. Then she remembered that, most likely, the young digger would come back to his claim at sunset to remove his tools, and she resolved to wait for him. Kathie would be wondering where she was, but she would forgive her for being late if she took Gerald back with her. No, she could not go away in uncertainty. She left Chips' claim, and, after wandering about for awhile aimlessly, she sat down on a great heap near the claim which Chips pointed out as belonging to Mr. Wood. She began abstractedly sorting in the gravel for agates, glancing every now and then in the direction of the claim. But Mr. Wood did not appear. Half an hour passed, and another; and another was following in its train; already the sun's great red ball had touched the horizon line, and was slowly and majestically sinking behind it. The "babies" were silent now, and the natives, loaded with sieves, shovels,

and picks, were hastening homewards down the kopje, and though she would fain have lingered, Pearl knew that she must go too.

"What time do you calculate to get home," asked Chips' voice at her elbow as she rose to go. "I thought you went home long ago. Are you waiting for anyone?"

"Yes; no, I am just going," she answered, somewhat embarassed by the question.

"So am I. I'll go along with you if you don't object to walkin' with such a dusty chap as I am. Which way shall we go, round by the road, or over Natal Kopje?"

"Whichever you like; it is longer by the road."

"Yes, and rougher by the kopje; but now I come to think of it, I'd rather go round by the road if it's all the same to you. There's a letter of mine at Smith's tent that I'd like to get."

It was all the same to Pearl, and they started homewards together. The sun had by this time disappeared, but the red afterglow bathed the rough rocky kopjes, imparting to them a peculiar picturesqueness; the river glowed like liquid fire, and every object looked as if it had been dipped in blood.

The fiery brilliance faded quickly, and by the time they came opposite Smith's tent it was nearly dark.

"Now, will you wait here while I run in and ask for my letter?" said Chips. "I won't be a minute. Why, Miss Pearl, there goes Wood; now you can see what a good-lookin' feller he is—at least, you could if it wasn't so dark. I'll be back in two twos."

He bounded across the road and into the tent, leaving Pearl standing with a beating heart waiting the approach of the tall young man who with bent head was walking slowly down the road. Was it her brother? Was it? Pearl felt almost giddy with suspense. His figure was tall and slight, and even his clumsy, ill-fitting digger's clothes could not conceal its easy grace. But his broad-brimmed hat was drawn low over his eyes and she could not see his face. She almost resolved to accost him, but the thought that perhaps after all he might not be Gerald deterred her, and in a few minutes he had disappeared in the darkness and the opportunity was gone.

Poor Pearl! Her disappointment was deep and bitter, and it was only by the strongest effort that she refrained from bursting into tears. But she tried to comfort herself

with the recollection that he would be sure to follow the example of the other diggers and move out to the new rush, and that she would see him there.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOUR YEARS AFTER.

THE sun was shining down upon the busy, dusty streets of Kimberley with such fervid intensity as to make one incline to the belief that the great luminary was bent upon trying to discover how much caloric the long-suffering inhabitants of the Diamond City could bear before they roasted altogether, or quite melted away. Everyone who could remained indoors, and those whom stern necessity forced into the streets, wore the lightest possible clothing, carried huge sun umbrellas, scanned the brazen sun for a cloud, and grumbled long and loudly at the heat.

One person, however, seemed to be quite indifferent to the fiery caresses of Old Sol. This was a young man who stood leaning over the wire fence which separates the dusty, unpaved street from the yawning hideous shaft of the Kimberley Central Mine. He was watching the busy moving forms below, which depth and distance diminished to the size of dolls, loading and unloading trucks, the cages gliding up and down the wires discharging their cargoes, and all the other odd and peculiar features of the great diamond mine, with the interest of one to whom the sight was unfamiliar. He was tall and well built, and had about him that air commonly known as "distinguished"; he was pale and thin as from illness, and the broad, black band upon his sleeve hinted at some recent bereavement. His was not a face which would be generally called handsome; but it possessed a beauty which no mere regularity of feature could have bestowed, for there was truth, manliness, and dignity in its expression. Anyone skilled in reading character from faces would have read in his, earnestness, decision, an unswerving rectitude of purpose, together with some degree of pride.

Graham Keith is a good deal changed since that day—now nearly four years ago—when he walked with Kathie Milner under the autumn-tinted beech trees in Miss Burnley's grounds. Little besides sorrow had been his portion

during the interval, and sorrow leaves ineffaceable traces behind it. But his is not a face of a disappointed or embittered man, for all that; there is an earnestness, a restfulness, and a quiet, steadfast hopefulness in his dark blue eyes which tell of a mind at peace with God. The great lessons of faith and patience which Kathie had been learning among the cares and trials of camp life, he had learnt among very different scenes and circumstances at home.

Most puzzling things in this world admit of satisfactory explanation, if people will only take the trouble to seek for it; and Graham Keith's strange silence and absence in those days when Kathie had watched and waited for him, or a letter from him, was no exception to the rule. On the day he had bidden her good-bye at the railway station he had hastened home with the intention of visiting his mother, paying his respects to his whimsical, invalid uncle, and then going at once to Beechwood to ask Kathie's hand from her father. But "man proposes, God disposes," and when he reached the little house in Bayswater, where his mother lived, he was told that she had that morning been summoned to Home Woods by a telegram from Colonel Keith, who had been taken suddenly and dangerously ill. She left word for him to follow her immediately upon his return. He went without delay, and upon reaching Home Woods he found his uncle worse than he expected.

The Colonel was almost unconscious, but he recognised his nephew, and from the moment he arrived till his uncle's death (which took place ten days later) the old man would not suffer him out of his sight for a moment. With the devotion of a loving son, Graham watched over him. He scarcely ate or slept in those days of anxiety, during which his uncle's life hung in the balance. There was no time to write to Kathie—not even to send her a word or line. She would be wondering at his silence, Graham knew; but he could not help it.

Of the trouble she was in he knew nothing, for the pile of newspapers, which accumulated day by day in the library, was not touched, and no breath of Gerald Milner's catastrophe had reached him. On the night of his uncle's death he had written to Kathie, and enclosed in her's a letter to her father. He told her of his uncle's death and his inability to leave Home Woods until after the funeral. This letter we know Kathie never received. When the funeral was over and the Colonel's will was read it was found, to

the astonishment of everyone, that to the nephew who had always shown him the respect and obedience due from a son to a beloved father, and whom he had brought up in the expectation of being his heir, he had left absolutely nothing. Home Woods, the beautiful estate which Graham had loved and looked upon as his home since his childhood, was left, with its large rental, to a distant cousin, another Graham Keith. This was naturally a bitter disappointment to the young man, not only on account of the loss of the fortune and the home which he had so long been taught to look upon as his own, but because it proved to him how little the uncle, who had exacted so much from him and his mother, had really cared for either. It was far more on his mother's account, than on his own, that he deplored the loss. His first thought, however, was of Kathie. It would make no difference to her feelings, he knew; but what of her father? Would he be willing that she should marry one who had nothing but his profession and a few, very few, paltry hundreds a year? The Milners were one of the first and oldest families in their county, and he had heard that they were proud. Would the owner of Beechwood Hall be willing to give his eldest daughter to a poor physician who had still his way to make in the world? No; Graham felt that he would not. But he would be patient and wait, and it would not be long, he felt sure, before he would be able to offer Kathie such a position as even her father would consider worthy of her. He would rise to eminence in his profession; he would—— But, in the meantime, he must write and inform her of what had happened, and the change which had taken place in his prospects in consequence.

He wrote the letter, and having dispatched it he returned once more to the library where he had written it, and, abstractedly taking one of the papers from the pile, began reading uninterestedly with his thoughts very far from the pages. But presently his eye caught sight of something which banished the indifference. It was a long account of the discovery of the body of Guy Despard in the river, and the accusation and search for Gerald Milner, the suspected murderer. The account of the forgery of Mr. Blackwood's name and the robbery of the safe was there also. Graham turned the paper over, and glanced at the date. It was more than three weeks old. Gerald Milner! Was it possible that this young man who was accused of murder, forgery, and theft, and who was flying from the

law, hunted by the detectives, was the brother of whom Kathie was so proud, and of whom she had spoken to him so often? He could not believe it. But yet it must be. "Gerald Milner, son of Sydney Milner, of Beechwood Hall, ——shire"; it could be no other.

This was the reason of Kathie's sudden summons home from school. Poor, poor Kathie! What a terrible blow to fall upon her! He knew how passionately and tenderly she loved her brother. What anguish she must be suffering! And what could she be thinking of his silence on the subject! She had never answered the letter which he had written telling her of his uncle's death. Perhaps his seeming want of sympathy with her in her great trouble was the reason; perhaps she was too sorrowful and heartsick to write.

"I will write at once," he exclaimed, "and to-morrow I will go down to Beechwood. What must she be thinking of me—my poor, poor Kathie?"

He seized the pen which he laid down a few minutes before, and wrote her a long, loving, sympathetic letter, just such a letter as she had hoped and waited vainly for. The reason she did not get it was this, that it, together with the one informing her that he was no longer heir of Home Woods, reached Beechwood the next day, when Kathie happened to be out spending the morning with Mrs. Clitheroe; and old nurse, who received them from Roger, had taken them to Kathie's room, and slipped them into a book that was lying on her table. On her return Kathie had not opened the book, and some time later it was packed with a number of others in a case for transport to the Cape, and all the time that case had by some strange chance—if there be such a thing as chance—remained unopened. And so, while Kathie waited and wondered, and grew heartsick with hope deferred, those letters which would have cheered and comforted her so inexpressibly, lay pressed between the leaves of that old book of Scotch poems.

"I will go to Beechwood to-morrow," Graham had said, but once more God had "disposed," and that very evening his mother had been seized with a dangerous ilness, and for long weeks her life was despaired of; and when at last she struggled back from the shadows of the dark valley, she was so weak and so dependent on him for care, that it was impossible for him to leave her even for a day. During all those weeks Graham had waited for an answer to his letters—

waited and hoped as Kathie had for his, but no letter came; and at last, as the slow weeks passed one after another without bringing an answer to any one of the three letters he had written, he began to despair of ever receiving one, and by degrees the conviction forced itself upon him that after all his being disinherited by his uncle *had* made a difference to Kathie. It was hard to believe it of her, but what could he think. Why, otherwise, did she not answer his letters or send him one little word?

Nothing of all this pain, anxiety, and disappointment did he tell his mother. He was her skilful, careful physician, her patient, thoughtful nurse, her loving attentive son, and she never guessed that an ever-increasing weight of sorrow and disappointment was settling about his heart.

"Few would take the loss of a fortune as quietly as you do, Graham," she said to him one day. "It does not seem to trouble you at all."

"Why should it trouble me?" he had replied, "when I have you still, my best of mothers?" And Mrs. Keith did not dream that ought was wrong.

It was not until some weeks after Christmas that Graham could leave his mother, and then, after establishing her in the little house at Bayswater which was to be their only home henceforth, he took the train for Beechwood, resolved not to judge Kathie hardly until he heard from her own lips the reason of her silence, and more than half persuaded in his own mind that her explanation, when he should hear it, would prove more than satisfactory.

He did not ask to be directed to the Hall, and go straight there, as a few weeks before he would have done. Instead, he took his valise in his hand and walked—there never was a cab or fly to be had at the sleepy little station—to the village, where he put up at the shabby inn known as the "Osborne Arms." Strangers did not go there very often, and the landlady herself waited upon the "London gentleman."

After luncheon he asked her to direct him to Beechwood Hall.

"There, now!" exclaimed the good woman triumphantly, without replying to his question, "I told my good man so! Your're the new owner, ain't you, now, sir?"

"The new owner of what?"

"Of the Hall, to be sure. I want to know if you bain't the gentleman who's bought the old place."

"I am not the new owner," replied Graham, surprised and considerably startled. "Is Beechwood Hall sold?"

"That it is. Dear heart, it'll be queer to think o' anyone but Milners livin' in the old place. Yes, sir, it's sold to a gent that's always lived in London. I thought it might be you, sir. I've heard as he's young and good-lookin'."

Graham could not help smiling, in spite of himself, at the broad compliment; but he said, gravely enough—

"I was not aware, until this moment, that Beechwood Hall had changed owners. The family must be leaving shortly if that is the case."

"Lawks, sir, haven't you heard? They've left!"

"Left—left the Hall!"

"Yes; left the Hall, sir, and left the country. They sailed for the Cape of Good Hope a week ago," answered the good woman, delighted with the effect the news had produced upon the stranger.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked, scarcely able to believe what she told him. "Are they all gone?"

"Every one, sir—the squire, and Miss Kathie, and the children, and the young gentleman."

"What young gentleman—Mr. Gerald Milner?"

"Bless you, no, sir; Mr. Gerald 'll never dare to show his face here again, poor lad. I mean the young gentleman from the Cape, as folks say is going to marry Miss Kathie. He's been stayin' at the Hall, and he's powerful rich, and they say he belongs to a good old English family though he does live at the Cape. Old Mr. Roger, as was coachman at the Hall, told me that his father and the squire was great friends in their young days. And he's such a nice lookin' young gent, too," continued the landlady, enlarging upon the subject, and glancing keenly at her grave silent listener, who she shrewdly suspected was more interested than he chose to appear in what she was telling him. "And he'd such a way o' flinging his money about! and then his ridin'! Lawks! You just ought to ha' seen him leapin' ditches and jumpin' fences, it used to make me shiver to look at him. He used often to ride with Miss Kathie——"

"How far is it to the Hall," he asked, interrupting her unceremoniously.

"'Taint far, not more'n two miles. You're goin' to have a look at it, sir? Well, it's worth the trouble. The servants are there yet, some of 'em, and they'll show you over the place."

Very slowly Graham walked along the road under the bare branches, his future stretching out before him as cold and sunless as the chill, grey sky of the January afternoon. He did not know how sure had been his hope of finding Kathie true in spite of her unaccountable silence, until now when he could hope no longer. Gone! Gone out of the country! Gone out of his life for ever! And gone too without one word or sign, or one written line to bid him farewell! How could he have been so deceived in her, he wondered. He would have staked his life on her goodness, her high principles, her lofty standard of right—and now. Now she had calmly and deliberately broken her solemn promise to him in order to marry a richer man. That was the reason of her silence, that was the reason his letters had remained unanswered, that was why no word had come to him in the dark days when he watched by what he had feared would be his mother's deathbed. A bitter scorn and pain, which were to be his companions for many and many a long day, grew up in his heart as he stood there under the bare branches, and parted for ever with what had been such a bright hope.

But Graham Keith, though saddened and disappointed, was not the man to indulge in weak repinings; he left Beechwood by the next train and went home. From that hour he devoted himself to his profession and to his mother, the only being he had left to love, and of whose love for him he could never have the faintest doubt. If there was a void in his life, an emptiness which nothing could fill, few ever guessed it. Every month added to his duties and to his progress in the profession he had chosen, and to which he devoted himself with the ardour of one who had few other interests in life. He determined to rise in his profession and he did rise, and Mrs. Keith was proud of her son.

When I say that he had few interests beyond his profession, I do not mean that he shut himself up away from his fellows and grew morose and gloomy. On the contrary, he mingled more freely with the world about him than he had ever done before in the old, happy days when the future had looked all sunshine. Not only in the world of culture and refinement, of social and intellectual polish, but in the world of hard-working, hard-thinking, coarse-speaking men and women, who had only seen the darkest and felt the roughest side of life. His professional duties first took him among them, and other duties, which he was learning from

his mother, and from the little, worn, black book which had been his mother's chart and guide through the troubled sea of life, kept him among them, and from them he learned many a noble, useful lesson that he would never have learned anywhere else.

In this manner three years passed away, so tranquilly and uneventfully on the surface, so full of deep, intense soul life beneath, and then——Graham had known it must come; but with what a shock and suddenness it came at last—his mother died, and he felt for a time that there was nothing left to live for. But by-and-by the old duties asserted their claims, and he threw himself into his work with such earnestness and entire self-abnegation that mind and body were unable to stand the strain. For some time he strove against the depression and nervousness which he knew were the precursors of severe illness; but in vain; he was obliged to yield at last, and Nature took an ample revenge for all the slights and neglects to which she had been subjected. For a long time he seemed on the brink of the grave, and his old nurse, who came all the way from Scotland to take care of her "boy," as she still called him, and the old physician who had been his father's friend, thought that the mother and son were not to be parted long. But their care and a naturally strong constitution conquered in the end, and he struggled back to life weak, helpless, and a perfect wreck of his strong, vigorous, energetic self.

"Now," said the old doctor gruffly, coming into the room one day some weeks after he had been pronounced convalescent, and finding his patient lying on a couch, faint and exhausted with the exertion of writing a letter. "Now, Graham, this won't do; it is of no use, you must go away."

"But, doctor," remonstrated Graham, "I cannot leave my work, and I shall be all right in a week or two."

"No, you won't; you won't be all right in a week or two, nor in a month or two; and let me tell you, Graham, you'll never be well again if you don't give up work for a time, and rest—rest mind as well as body. Take my advice, and leave England for a month or two, or, better still, a year or two, and don't come back until you are better. I don't say you are to spend your time in idleness; work when you are able to work and rest when you ought to rest."

"I have no wish to rest," Graham had answered wearily.

"It is no question of wishes," the old doctor had replied more gruffly than ever. "It is a question of duty; and for

a fellow who is so fond of telling other people their duty, you seem to have a very poor idea of your own. It is your duty to go and rest; if you don't, you'll never be fit for anything again, and so I tell you plainly."

The doctor left the room and the discussion ended; but he took occasion to renew it from time to time, and Graham, finding that week after week went over without bringing back his strength, determined to take the advice of his old friend and physician. So he sold his practice, bade farewell to his mother's grave and his many friends high and low, and sailed for the Cape.

Why, when he had all the world to choose from, he had decided to go to South Africa it is hard to say. If a longing which had of late grown very deep and intense, in spite of his efforts to stifle it—a longing to see Kathie once more and hear her voice—was at the bottom of it, he never admitted, even to himself.

He had landed at Cape Town, intending to remain there for a time; but finding the hot, moist climate alarmingly enervating after the fresh, life-giving ocean breezes, he followed the advice of an old friend and went to Kimberley. He had been a week in the Diamond City, when, feeling much better than usual, he had started out on the hot morning described at the beginning of this chapter to look at the world-famous shaft of the Kimberley Central Mine.

He was watching interestedly the pigmy forms below, unconscious that he in his turn had become an object of curiosity to a gentleman who was standing in front of the Diamond Market, coolly staring at him through a lorgnette. "It must be," the latter said to himself, "I cannot be mistaken, it must be Graham Keith;" and a moment later Graham was surprised by a hand being laid on his shoulder and a voice saying:

"Why, Keith, what good fortune or fairy has brought you here?" and he turned to meet the gaze of a pair of merry blue eyes, and to find his hand taken in a crushing grasp.

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken," his friend went on delightedly, without giving him time to speak. "I've been staring at the back of your head for the last ten minutes. Who'd have thought when we parted in London—five—six—seven years ago, that we should meet here? How long ago is it?"

"Seven years, I think. This is a pleasure I did not expect

when I came to Kimberley. I am more glad than I can say to meet you, Stephen."

"And I to meet you. But, Keith, man, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I have been ill."

"Ill! why you look like a ghost! and this?" he added, laying his hand on the black band on Graham's sleeve, which for the first time caught his eye.

"My mother," replied Graham briefly."

"Your mother! my dear fellow! and I have lost my father since last we met. And Fanny," he added, in a lighter tone, "you have heard of Fanny's marriage?"

"Yes; is she in town?"

"Very much in town—she is in Paris at present. But there is some one else in town to whom I must introduce you without delay—Mrs. Stephen Langton!"

"Your wife! I did not know that you were married, Stephen."

"Oh, yes; I'm married. I've been married for a year and a half, and my wife is—well, I can't tell you what she is; mortals call her Blanche Fordham; but you shall see her for yourself. You have left England for good, Keith? You have come to settle in the colony?"

"I do not know; I am half inclined to do so."

"Make the half a whole; you can't do better. How long have you been here?"

"In Kimberley?—only a week. I was in Cape Town more than a month."

"Where are you staying now?"

"At the Central Hotel."

"Well, you must pack up your traps this very day and come to us. Blanche and I will nurse you back to health in no time. Now no excuses; you must come. Blanche will be delighted, and so shall I. Think of the thousand and one things we have to say to each other."

Graham yielded to his friend's persuasions, not unwilling, if the truth must be told, to exchange the noise and confusion of the great hotel for the peaceful retirement of Stephen's home, and an hour later he was lying on a couch in Mrs. Langton's pretty drawing-room, which, with its polished, carpetless floor, its shaded windows, and its stands of rare flowers and ferns, presented a pleasant contrast to the glaring, dusty streets.

"I am sorry Blanche is out," said his friend, as he col-

lected all the cushions in the room and placed them at Graham's disposal; "but she won't be long. Her maid tells me she has gone out driving with Mrs. De Beer and young Hildyard. I don't know what she can be thinking of to go out in such weather; but South African ladies are veritable salamanders, I assure you, Keith."

"With whom did you say Mrs. Langton had gone out?"

"With Ambrose Hildyard and his sister, Mrs. De Beer, the wife of my oldest friend in Africa, Gilbert De Beer. I suppose you know no one here yet."

"No, but the name of Hildyard sounds familiar. Is he from the Cape?"

"Yes, from Cape Town; his father has a splendid estate there. Ambie is a partner in the firm of Hildyard and De Beer, and being a clever, pleasant fellow, as well as rich and good looking, he is mightily popular here."

"He is married, of course."

"No; he is engaged—at least I've heard so—to a young lady at the River Diggings. Miss Middleton—Millar—no, Milner, that is it, Miss Milner."

Graham did not reply, and he lay still for such a long time that Mr. Langton fancied he must be asleep and softly left the room.

A little later Mrs. Langton returned, and he conceived a warm liking for his friend's pretty, vivacious wife, who was so kind and cordial, and who had such a warm welcome for "dear Stephie's oldest friend."

Graham retired that night with a determination to visit the River Diggings as soon as possible. Kathie was Kathie Milner still; she was not yet the wife of another, and he felt that he must see her once more—himself unseen—and then he would go away and forget her. He told himself over and over again that the wish to see her was a weak and foolish one which he had no right to gratify. Kathie was nothing to him. She had proved herself weak, false, and mercenary; but—such is the inconsistency of human nature—although he told himself a hundred times over that it was folly and unmanly weakness, he was none the less determined to go to Hebron as soon as it should be practicable.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE "NEW RUSH."

"So this is the 'new rush'?" exclaimed Pearl, springing from the wagon as soon as it stopped beneath or rather beside a great clump of vaal-bushes. "It's a pleasanter looking place than Hebron, at any rate."

"That it is," replied Chips, whose wagon they had engaged to convey them from Natal Kopje, and who had himself acted as charioteer. "And if you don't find any diamonds here, Miss Milner," he added, turning to Kathie, "you'll have a change o' scenery at all events."

"Yes, it is pretty," she replied, looking over the broad, grassy flat with its clumps of soft, greyish vaal-bush. "It is very pretty, but I hope the diamonds will be forthcoming also."

Chips shook his head meditatively. "I hope they will," he said, "but I'm afraid they won't, in spite of Mr. Brandt's 'finds.' If he did find them diamonds here I believe he got all there was to find, and if he didn't——"

"But he said he found them here," interrupted Kathie. "Why should he say so if he did not?"

"Like as not he wanted the kopjes prospected without the trouble and expense of doing it all himself. P'raps it's all right, though," he added cheerily. "P'raps Mr. Milner'll find one here big enough to make up for all the blanks. I hope so. Will this place do you, or shall we move on a bit farther."

Mr. Milner had not come to the "new rush" with them; he had remained behind to pay his claim license, and to sell two or three small diamonds which he had found a few weeks before.

"I think this place will do very nicely," said Kathie, in answer to Chips' question. "We must not be very far from the diggings, or papa will have too long a walk every day. Where are the people working?"

"Over that way. Come round here and you'll see. We ain't a quarter of a mile from the claims."

Kathie followed him round the thick clump of bushes and on to a little rise, and an exclamation of surprise and pleasure escaped her at the scene which

met her gaze. The broad, grassy flat, with its park-like clumps and groves of vaal-bush, was bounded on three sides by low bush-covered kopjes, and all over one of them were scattered most picturesquely round and square tents, marquees, and tiny reed houses; and in amongst these frail dwellings were the diggers' claims, the bright red of the freshly upturned sand and gravel contrasting brilliantly with the soft grey-green of the waving vaal-bush. Wagons, drawn by long spans of mules, and loaded with water casks, were making their way slowly from claim to claim. The ground was covered with broken quartz and crystals, which glittered like bits of glass, making the hill-side dazzling. Altogether it was as bright, busy, and picturesque a scene as any one could wish to look upon; but as she gazed Kathie's eyes filled with sudden tears, for she knew or feared that all those busy, active workers, the sound of whose voices and the clinking of whose spades and picks came so musically to her on the breeze, were working for nothing; that all their hopes would end in nothing, and that in a few weeks or months at most the pretty, busy kopjes would be left to the birds and mearkats once more, and the diggers, disappointed for the hundredth time, would be back in Hebron, wearily trying to find in Natal and Hebron Kopjes what was not there to be be found.

Towser Chips, guessing something of her thoughts, turned away to the wagon, saying,

"Now, Miss Milner, I heard you say that when you come out here you meant to take a holiday; jest take my advice and begin at once. Take your shawls and cushions and sich notions and go and have a rest under some o' them bushes. There ain't a thing you can do," he added, as she glanced at the loaded wagon, and the bundles and boxes which the Kafir boys were beginning to throw down in all directions. "Here, stop that, Klass and Piet, will you? Jest you wait till I tell you what to do. You needn't trouble about anything, Miss Milner; jist tell me where you want the tents pitched and we'll have 'em up as taut as no matter by the time your father gets here."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Kathie gratefully. "But you must not trouble really, Mr. Chips. Papa will be here presently with our Kafirs in time to put up the tents before dark, and I know you want to get back home early."

"No sich thing," he replied emphatically. "I ain't in no hurry. I've made up my mind to stay till to-morrow, and I

ain't agoin' to stir till I see you fixed up. No, you're not agoin' to thank me neither. I'd do as much for any one, and it's as much for my bullocks' sakes as anythin' else; jist think what a feed they'll have off this splendid grass if they stay here all night."

"Let us at least stay and help you then, if you will insist upon being so kind."

"No, there ain't a thing you kin do yet; me and the boys will off-load and put up the tents, and when I want to know where to put the boxes and sich, I come for you. Now do you jest go off till it's all done"—and without waiting for any more thanks or remonstrances he turned away and began hauling the tent poles off the wagon.

Kathie stood and looked on for a few minutes, and then she and Pearl sauntered slowly away among the bushes.

"It is a pretty place," said Pearl at length, throwing herself down under a shady bush and gazing at the great cloud-shadows that chased each other over the flat. "If we get nothing else by our move, Kathie, we'll at least have a glorious rest and something fresh and green to look at. What a relief the cool shadows are after the glaring heaps and shifting red dust-clouds of Hebron."

"Yes, it is very pretty," replied Kathie, her eyes following the direction of Pearl's as they wandered appreciatingly over the grassy expanse dotted with ant-heaps over which hung a trailing growth of velvety purple flowers. "Oh, Pearl, I hope we shall find something here; papa will be so disappointed if we do not. We shall have to sell Mosswood if we do not find something before long."

"Well, perhaps it would be the best thing we could do I mean if we got a large sum of money like that all at once, we could leave Hebron. It would be enough to take us to Johannesburg, and if we had enough to take us there and start us, as Mr. Chips would say, I think papa would be willing to go now, don't you?"

Perhaps he would. Perhaps it would be the best thing we could do; and yet, to sell Mosswood—the only place in the world that really is our own—would seem very much like burning our ships."

"Yes, it would. Oh, Kathie! what would it be like to have a home again? Fancy how it would feel to be living at dear old Mosswood again."

"Yes. I can imagine how it looks this afternoon, with its low, shadowy rooms, the great tree-shadows falling over

it, and the fresh sea-breeze rustling the leaves of the orange-trees," and Kathie drew a long, regretful sigh.

"Oh, Pearl!" she exclaimed suddenly. "What wicked grumblers we have become. We no sooner leave dirty, hot, dusty Natal Kopje and come to this fresh, cool, grassy spot, than we begin at once to murmur and grumble. Suppose that during our holiday—by-the-by, how long is it to last?—we strictly prohibit all grumbling and allusions to subjects likely to lead to sad looking back."

"Very well, I'm willing," said Pearl, laughing. "And if Mr. Chips—good fellow that he is—will insist upon doing all the work, suppose I go and fetch a book and read to you? I'm dying to begin 'Through the Dark Continent.' Ah, me! if I could only be a man, and be a second Stanley."

"I don't doubt you would quite eclipse the first, dear. But as that is something which you can never be——"

"I need not talk about it, you would say. You are right, as you invariably are, my sagest of sisters. Shall I go and get a book?"

"Yes, if you are not too tired. I do not feel inclined to read myself; but I shall enjoy lying here listening to you. Where are the boys?"

"Away over there. Syd is looking for birds' nests, and Clive is making a bridge, or tunnel, or something of the sort. That boy is a born engineer, Kathie; do you know it?

"I know it; and I hope his talent may be cultivated, and his strong natural bent properly developed by education."

"I hope it may; but I don't see how it is going to be," replied Pearl, as she hurried away and disappeared among the bushes.

Kathie did not see it either, and the future of the two boys was beginning to give her a great deal of anxious thought. What was it going to be? she wondered often; growing up as they were without education, without money, and without friends. What chance would they have, thus handicapped in the race of life? It troubled her father, too, a great deal, Kathie knew, though he seldom spoke of it; and thus made it weigh all the more heavily upon her own mind.

Very nobly, and "in the teeth of clenched antagonisms," Kathie had striven to do her duty by Sydney and Clive. She had taught and trained them, striven to instil into their minds all that was noble and good, to put before them a lofty standard of right—striven in every way to prepare

them for a life of earnest, useful work; and she had succeeded better even than she knew. Her boys, though their studies were frequently interrupted, and often suspended for weeks at a time, were far better informed than most boys of their age. And Kathie's system of moral training had been eminently successful, for Syd and Clive would have gone to the block rather than uttered a word that was not strictly true, and had a manliness of bearing and a self-control very unusual in boys aged respectively ten and twelve.

What was to become of her boys? The question was to Kathie all important, and many and many a night, long after Pearl was asleep, she lay awake thinking, planning, and praying for them.

It was Sydney's future that gave her the most anxiety; not that he was the less tractable and docile of the two, but that he was growing so like Gerald. He had the same proud, high spirit, and the same quick, fiery temper, the consequences of which had proved so disastrous to poor Gerald, and which might prove equally disastrous to him. Kathie knew this, and above all things she strove to teach him self-control.

The boy had, with all Gerald's faults, all his virtues and all his brilliant, uncommon beauty. Strangers often stopped to ask who was the boy so shabbily but neatly dressed, whose face was so unusually handsome, and whose unmistakable air of good birth and breeding was so strikingly in contrast with all around him.

Clive was much less proud and excitable. Quiet, rather delicate, and of a grave meditative turn of mind, he was far less likely to be popular than Sydney, and consequently far less likely to be led astray.

Both boys repaid her love and care by an enthusiastic admiration which amounted almost to idolatry. Kathie was in their eyes the impersonation of all that was good and lovely—she could do no wrong.

She sat thinking long, deeply and sadly, quite forgetting the flight of time, until, happening to notice how long the shadows were growing, she remembered Pearl's absence, and the errand on which she had gone.

"Why, what can she be staying for?" she exclaimed; and, getting up, she was hastening in the direction in which Pearl had gone, when suddenly turning round a thick clump of bushes, she almost ran against a tall young man, who, with a sieve in one hand and a spade in the other, had

evidently come from prospecting in some distant kopje. He was about to pass her with a curt apology, when one of those sudden whirlwinds so common there swept over them, dashing the young digger's sieve from his hand, and carrying off Kathie's hat and sunshade; leaving the two latter high and dry upon the forked branches of a dead vaal-bush as it swept past. The stranger hastened after them, and returned holding up the sunshade, from which the lace hung in festoons.

"I don't think your hat has suffered by its aerial flight," he said with a half smile, "but I'm afraid the parasol is not much improved."

Kathie returned the smile frankly, as she thanked him and replaced her hat upon her disordered hair. The digger picked up his sieve and spade, and, raising his hat courteously, walked away; but he returned after he had gone a few yards to ask, "Have you come from the camp?"

Kathie drew herself up and answered coldly in the negative. She resented the question as an inquisitive impertinence.

"I beg your pardon," he said, while a slight sarcastic smile crossed his dark face; "but I thought perhaps you had come from the camp and lost your way among the bushes, in which case I might have been of service to you."

"Oh, no, I have not lost my way; our camp is only a few hundred yards from here," she answered, quite ashamed of her rudeness; and lifting his hat once more, with a mixture of deference and hateur, which struck her as oddly familar, he walked away. Indeed there was something familiar in the young man's whole appearance for which she could not account. Who was it he resembled? What was there in the tone of his voice and the quick searching glance that was so familiar. Kathie sat down on a big ant-heap and tried to account for the resemblance, and though she could not do so, some hidden chain of association carried her thoughts away from her present life and surroundings to the past, and she went over again in fancy the old calm, sunshiny days at Miss Burnley's school, and the days when she had first known Graham Keith. How changed she was since those days! She could hardly believe that the laughing, light-hearted girl, whom she saw in memory's glass flitting about the old, dingy rooms, and up and down the long garden paths, was really herself.

She held a sharp-pointed stick in her hand, and as she mused she, from force of that habit which becomes second nature to every dweller on the diggings, scraped away busily among the gravel and broken stones which were scattered about, and she was presently recalled from her dreams of the past to a sudden, sharp recollection of the present, its wants and needs, by a glimpse of something white and glittering that lay under her stick. The colour rushed to Kathie's cheeks. Was it possible that she had found a diamond? She took it up with fingers that actually trembled. Yes, it was a diamond, not very large, but perfectly shaped, white, and flawless. She pressed it impulsively to her lips; it meant so much to her, that little, white, shining thing. It meant, perhaps, the Kafir's long arrears of wages paid; it meant clothes for the boys and medicine for Clive. Her eyes filled with tears of mingled pain and pleasure; pain that their needs were so many, pleasure that some of them could be supplied. The diamond would weigh about four carats, and was worth from forty to fifty pounds.

"If I can even get twenty for it," murmured Kathie, as she tenderly dusted the little gem with her handkerchief, and then held it under the microscope she always carried. "It is perfect; I never saw one so beautiful before."

"What is so beautiful?" asked Pearl's voice from the other side of the bush.

For answer Kathie opened her hand and displayed her treasure to Pearl's astonished eyes.

"A diamond! Where did you find it?"

"Just here, under the wreath of pink convolvoli. Is it not beautiful?"

"Splendid. How much is it worth?"

"It must be worth at least forty pounds. See, it is a frosted stone. Perhaps we shall get twenty or fifteen pounds for it."

"Yes, you ought to get as much as that for it. Kathie, I take it as a good omen, your finding a diamond like that just as we have arrived here."

"I hope it will prove so. But what kept you so long, Pearl?"

"Mr. Chips wanted some twine, and I had to look for it, and then papa came, and I stopped to make him some tea. Fancy, he had to walk all the way from Hebron."

"Had he? Oh, how tired he must be. Where was Mr.

Brandt then? I thought papa was coming in his mule-cart."

"So he was, but there was some mistake, and he left half an hour before papa was ready to come. Whom do you think papa met in Hebron?"

"I do not know."

"Guess."

"I cannot; not——"

"Yes, Ambie."

"And he came out here with papa?"

"No," replied Pearl, more than half inclined to be vexed with her for the expression of relief which overspread her face as she heard the negative. "You look glad, Kathie."

"I am not sorry. What brought Ambie to Hebron?"

"He came to see us; he is on his way to Johannesburg. Hildyard and De Beer are about to open a business there. He had not time to come out here, but he will be back in a week or two, and then he will come. Kathie, when are you going to reward Ambie for all his years of devotion?"

The question was so abrupt and unexpected that Kathie stopped short and looked at her sister, the bright, sensitive colour flying to her cheek. But she answered quietly enough:

"Never. I have told him so more than once."

"He is so good, Kathie, so unselfish and kind, he deserves some return."

"I have given him all the return I can. I like him sincerely, I regard him as our best and truest friend; I would do anything for Ambie, but——"

"But just what he wishes."

"Why do you speak so, Pearl? You would not have me pretend to care more for him than I do."

"No, of course not," Pearl answered, so impatiently that Kathie was at a loss to understand what had come over her.

They walked on for some time in silence over the lengthening shadows, feeling unconsciously, perhaps, but certainly not seeing nor properly appreciating the beauty of the earth and sky lighted by brilliant sunset splendour.

"Why do people always wish for just that thing which is unattainable?" Pearl was wondering. "Why do they not sometimes wish for what they can get, or get what they wish for? Why must Ambie go on caring for Kathie when

she cannot care for him? If——" She did not finish the sentence, but the expression of the delicate face under the straw hat grew strangely grave.

It was a glorious evening. Any artist who could have transferred to his canvas that unutterably beautiful sky of pure, clear, greenish blue, flicked all over with feathery, rose-coloured clouds, which in the west turned to purple, gold, and gorgeous crimson masses, and could have reproduced that peculiar tint thrown by them upon the tents, rocks, and fantastic vaal-bushes, would have made his fortune.

Towser Chips had done wonders during their absence. All the tents were pitched, and it was easy to see that no careless hand had been busy about them. There were no slanting poles, no slack ropes, no drooping corners, every inch of canvas was drawn out stiff and taut; smooth paths had been made between the tents, a space cleared for their kitchen and their iron dining-room (a recent acquisition) to be erected upon. Boxes and bundles had been carried under cover, and Chips with his usual thoughtful kindness had searched for and found the coffee-pot, cups, and plates. He placed them in readiness, and then, his quick eye having caught sight of the small, square, white flag which gave modest notice of the arrival in camp of a fruit-seller from Warrenton, he hurried off and soon returned with a dish of grapes and another of peaches, and when Kathie and Pearl appeared he was busy building a fire.

The two girls, throwing aside all sad thoughts and looks —they seldom carried the latter into the presence of their burdened, careworn father—set about spreading a gipsy tea upon the grass in the light of the fire, and soon they were all gathered around it, Towser Chips, as usual, talkative, lively, and attentive. He had an inexhaustible fund of anecdote and genuine, homely wit, and the frequent peals of laughter from Sydney and Clive, and an occasional amused smile on Mr. Milner's grave face, testified to the success of his good-natured efforts to banish sad thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN MR. VERE'S STUDIO.

THE wild, windy winter passed, and spring, when it came, clothed the hills and valleys of Witwatersrandt with a carpet

of vivid green, and filled the crevices of the rocks on Hetty's favourite kopje with ferns and brilliant, hardy, little flowers. The Browns were still Mr. Vere's tenants at Klipkopjes Farm. They preferred remaining there to moving into the town until, as Mr. Brown said, "things were more settled there," which rather vague speech meant until the rough and somewhat lawless camp emerged, as it was rapidly doing, into a settled and orderly town. They preferred to stay, and Mr. Vere was willing that they should do so. If, when he had returned from his long hunting trip, he had had any intention of avoiding his guests and treating them with distant politeness, he soon gave it up. It was impossible to live in the same house with the Browns and fail to be on terms of intimacy with them. There was something so bright, genial, and sincere about them all, that he would have been a churl indeed who failed to respond to their cordiality, and be in his turn frank and friendly. From the time, a few days after his return, that he had rather reluctantly accepted an invitation from Mrs. Brown to take tea with them and spend the evening in their bright, cosy, little parlour, he never dreamed of shunning their society. Whatever was his reason for leading a life of seclusion and loneliness—and that it was a strong one there could be no doubt—they never sought to pry into it; their kindly interest in him was without the faintest tinge of curiosity. By degrees he lost all fear of being asked intrusive questions, and it came to be looked upon as a matter of course that he should spend at least a part of every evening with them.

It was a deep pleasure to the lonely man, who had lived so long shut up with his books and his dog, to find himself welcomed and made one of their little family circle. Mr. Brown was so genial, so simple-hearted and manly, Mrs. Brown so sweet and gentle, her piety so genuine and unassuming, that he very soon came to entertain for them a deep respect and most sincere liking. But it was after all Hetty's society that gave him the most pleasure. Her unshadowed brow, her ringing, merry laugh, her flashing smile, were the very essence of sunshine; it was as impossible to be sad or gloomy in her bright presence as it would be for chill or damp to exist under the bright, unclouded rays of a tropical sun. Hetty admired and liked him in her warm-hearted fashion, pitied his evident melancholy, and wore little romances out of that and the slight mystery which sur-

rounded him. But she half despised him at the same time for the aimless, idle life which she believed he led. She knew nothing of the long mornings spent in painting and in packing pictures for transport to England, nor of the quantity of midnight oil he burnt while he wrote articles and essays for half-a-dozen papers and magazines.

But it was not long before she discovered that the life she had been fancying idle and self-indulgent was in fact a very busy one. One morning she was standing outside her parlour window busily engaged in filling a number of flower-pots with earth, preparatory to planting in them bulbs and ferns, when Mr. Vere came up the garden path. He paused for a moment to admire, artist-like, the pretty picture she made, in her broad gipsy hat, with the sun turning her white dress into a glorified robe, and her hair into burnished gold, before he joined her.

"May I ask what you are busy about, Miss Hetty? What are you trying to do?"

"I am trying to fill my pots with earth and succeeding as you see," she answered with her bright, frank smile. "I can't live without flowers."

"Why should you try? I will give you the whole farm for a flower garden if you wish."

"Will you? May I?" she asked eagerly. "I don't mean the whole farm, of course; but I should like this little bit of ground in front of the house if I may have it."

"Of course you may have it. But I am afraid you will find it rather too stony for anything but potatoes. I will tell Tozeni to dig the ground over for you."

"Oh, thank you; but—but I did not wish to give you any trouble."

"Nor will you. I only require Tozeni's services for a few hours during the day, and you need not hesitate to employ him. He will be delighted, I assure you; he has a taste for gardening, and the flourishing condition of the kitchen garden on the other side of the house testifies to his industry. I have a number of bulbs and a large collection of wild tree and flower seeds which I brought from the north of Matabeleland and the banks of the Zambesi, and which you may try and naturalise in the Transvaal if you like."

"Thank you; I should like to try. I cultivated wild flowers very successfully in my garden at home."

"I am afraid you will not be so successful here; some of

the flowers are very delicate, and require more shelter than they can get on this wind-blown height. But we will do what we can. Are you as fond of painted flowers as of natural ones?"

"I don't know; I don't think I should be. I have not seen many."

"I will show you some now if you care to look at them."

Hetty had never been into Mr. Vere's sanctum sanctorum, though with his little rudely-furnished sitting-room she was familiar, and it was therefore with a good deal of interest and some little curiosity that she looked round the room into which he conducted her.

The lower panes of the window were painted white; the upper ones were shaded so that the light which came in was soft and subdued. The walls were hung with pictures and sketches framed and unframed. Her old friend the organ, whose deep, rich voice she had often heard since the first night, stood in one corner, a large desk heaped with MSS. stood in another, and the floor and tables were littered with curiosities of all kinds—native weapons, strange roots, plants and seeds, stones, minerals, bones, horns and skins, feathers, carved calabashes, Zulu head-dresses, a telescope, a large microscope on a stand, and a hundred other things strange and interesting to Hetty were there. She would fain have lingered to examine, but Mr. Vere, after placing her in the only seat the room contained—a rude chair of Tozeni's manufacture covered with a lion skin—put on the table before her a number of small pictures about a quarter of a yard square, with curiously carved frames of wood, bone, and ivory. Hetty looked at them with wondering admiration. They were all of flowers, painted against a delicate background, and painted so beautifully, finished so exquisitely, that it was hard to believe that they were painted at all. Hetty almost fancied that she could smell their fragrance and see the dew-drops glisten on their leaves.

"Do you like them?" he asked, after looking on for some time in silence.

"Like them! they are beautiful—exquisite! I suppose I need not ask if they are your work?"

"They are mine. I received an order for a dozen about three months ago; they are just finished."

"In such a little while," she exclaimed; "how hard you must have worked."

He smiled. "Yes," he answered quietly; "I am not quite the lazy fellow you have been thinking me."

Hetty looked up quickly. "How did you know——" she began, then stopped, blushing furiously at the admission she had made.

"It is not a very difficult matter to find out what is your opinion on most subjects, Miss Hetty; you are a very transparent person, and I feel sure that you have been regarding me as an idle, useless cumberer of the earth ever since you have been here. Confess, now, that it is so."

"No, not quite so bad as that," she said frankly; "but I will confess that I thought you led rather an idle, aimless life, and at the same time I beg your pardon most sincerely for having made such a mistake."

"Pray do not," he answered gravely, taking in his the shapely hand she held out so frankly. "It was very natural for you to think so, I am sure."

When she had finished examining and admiring the pictures, he asked her if she would like to look at his sketches of South African scenery. She replied delightedly in the affirmative, and he placed before her a well-filled folio containing sketches of different parts of the country through which he had travelled. Hetty turned them over slowly, admiring the bold, spirited drawing, and the delicate, life-like colouring. All at once she paused with an exclamation of pleasure before a sketch of a broad, blue river, with smooth green banks on one side, and dark, wooded hills, sloping down to the water's edge, on the other. The picture sky was grey, and feathery wreaths of mist lay on the hill-tops; but the setting sun was struggling through the clouds, and a glorious rainbow spanned the eastern sky. Hetty clapped her hands rapturously, while a sudden rush of tears filled her eyes. "I know it!" she exclaimed impulsively; "it is my dear, dear old Buffalo River;" and then, ashamed of her emotion, she added apologetically, "I have been there so often that it always seems like a part of my own home I have seen the river so a hundred times, with just that light upon it, and the long, white waves on the bar crossing each other so, and the farthest ones just tipped with rose colour; it is lovely." There were numbers of other sketches, many of which Hetty knew from pictures and photographs. "This is Cape Town," she said, "and that is Table Mountain with the cloth upon it. This is Wynberg, and this is a bit of Port Elizabeth; and—oh!—

this is the waterfall near King William's Town. I know that place very well—I have often been there. Have you any bits of Kimberley?"

"No; I have never been there; and all of these are sketches of places I have visited."

"And have you never visited the 'City of Dust and Diamonds,' as I have heard it called?"

"No; neither business nor pleasure has as yet ever led me in that direction. These," he added, turning over a few leaves," are picturesque bits of Matabeleland."

"How pretty! and what a number you have! Have you been there often?"

"Very often. I have hunted all over the country, alone with Tozeni and in the company of other hunters, and I have always been filled with melancholy when travelling through that country."

"Why? Is it so dreary?"

"On the contrary, it is a beautiful country, and blessed with a delightful climate. But it is sad to see so fair a land in the hands and under the absolute sway of the bloodthirsty despot who holds the lives of his subjects in his hands, and values them no more than I do that of yonder spider. If Matabeleland were possessed by an enlightened European Power capable of developing its marvellous resources, it would soon become one of the finest countries in the world."

"Have you ever seen the king—the cruel Lo Bengulo?"

"No. I was on the point of having an interview with his majesty once, but it did not take place. If it had, I should not be here now, Miss Hetty."

"Why not? Tell me the story, please."

"It is not much of a story. We were travelling through the country; I, George Innes—a friend of mine whom I had picked up in Pretoria—Tozeni, and three or four Basutos. We had been on a hunting trip to the Zambesi, and were returning with a large supply of skins and horns, for we had been very successful. Knowing the chief's dislike and jealousy of foreigners, we were very cautious, kept as far as possible from his principal kraals, travelled only by night, and kept as quiet as we could during the day, and never stirred a yard from our camp unarmed. But, as the sequel proved, all our precautions were unavailing; jealous eyes had watched our entrance into the country, and it soon reached the ears of the king's headmen that a party of

armed white men were travelling through the country without his permission, and men were immediately dispatched after us with orders to capture us alive and convey us to the king's kraal.

"When we discovered that we were being watched and pursued we held a council of war, and it was decided that our wisest plan was to separate, Tozeni and I to continue our journey as if we suspected nothing, and the others with the skins and ivory to hasten by forced marches into Bechuanaland. This separation we effected one dark night, and the next day Tozeni and I rode off slowly in a direction opposite to that which we intended afterwards to take.

"The Zulus did not follow us; doubtless they thought that we had only ridden out for a few hours' sport and would soon return to our companions, whom they imagined to be still encamped where they had seen them on the evening before.

"We rode all that day and part of the night with scarcely any rest, making a wide detour, and at midnight we found ourselves once more in our right road, and sixty or seventy miles south of the place where we had parted from our companions. We hobbled our poor, jaded horses and lay down to rest under the shadow of a huge rock. We felt so certain that the Zulus were completely deceived that we kept no watch and took no precautions to guard against a surprise. This feeling of security cost us dear. When we awoke at sunrise we found to our dismay that a party of twenty or thirty armed Zulus had surrounded us while we slept. Resistance was useless, flight impossible, so we suffered ourselves to be disarmed, bound, and led away. The Zulus had discovered our ruse, and without the loss of an instant hastened after us.

"After two days we reached the great kraal, and the people turned out *en masse* to gaze at us and feast their eyes upon our misery and despair, doubtless anticipating the further gratification of witnessing our execution a few hours later. They were doomed to disappointment, however, for the king was absent, and it had of course to be postponed until his return.

"We were dragged before one of the chief's headmen and by him subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. 'What were we doing in Lo Bengulo's country?' he demanded. 'How dared we travel through it without the king's permission? Who had sent us? What were we looking for

in Matabeleland? Who had dared to send spies into the country of the great chief? Where were our companions?' A hundred other questions he asked us. Tozeni being instructed by me replied to them all by a shake of his woolly head. 'He did not know. He knew nothing. He was the Umlongu's servant. Ask the Umlongu.' And nothing more could be drawn from him. The old man found me equally impracticable, for I thought it wisest not to appear to understand the language; so I replied to all his stern interrogations by a blank stare or a question in Dutch or English. At length, in great disgust, he gave up the attempt, telling us that when Lo Bengulo questioned us we should be obliged to speak, and with threats and curses dismissed us.

"We were dragged from his presence, and I was separated from my faithful Tozeni, who was led away to a hut at some distance from that into which I was thrust. I was tightly bound to a stake at one side of the hut, the door was shut, and I was left to my own reflections, which, as you may imagine, were anything but pleasant. Escape was out of the question; there was not the remotest chance of our being rescued; even if our comrades knew of our capture, what could six men do against thousands? and long ere they could bring us help we should have suffered death, and all those cruel tortures which the Zulus know so well how to inflict. Shall you think me very cowardly if I say that I looked forward to the morrow with inexpressible fear and dread.

Hetty looked at him with one of her bright, clear glances. "I should think you very untruthful," she replied frankly, "if you told me that the prospect of such a death had no terrors for you."

"My cramped position soon became unendurable," he resumed, "and the thongs with which they had bound me cut into my wrists and arms, and caused me intolerable pain, which, together with fatigue, anxiety, and hunger—for they had not so much as given us a mouthful of water since our capture—produced a sort of semi-unconsciousness. As I lay thus, the present with all its horrors faded from my mind, and I seemed to be living in the past once more. My old home, scenes and friends of my boyhood, the faces of my parents, my sisters and brothers, seemed to be gliding in panoramic fashion before me.

"About midnight I was roused from the stupor into

which I had fallen by hearing a stealthy scratching noise outside, as of some one trying to cut an opening in the thatched side of the hut. Who could it be? A dozen improbable conjectures flashed into my mind. Had Tozeni escaped and come to rescue his master? Had one of my captors, less cruel and barbarous than the rest, come to murder me quickly and quietly in the night, to save me from the cruel, lingering death which awaited me in the morning? Hardly the latter; for mercy is a quality which has no place in the Zulu's heart, especially mercy towards a white man. What could it be? I listened in an agony of impatience, and by degrees a small opening was made in the side of the hut and a hand was thrust through—a black hand, small and shapely—a woman's undoubtedly. Quickly the opening was enlarged and a face appeared, and the next instant the thongs which so painfully bound my wrists were severed. The woman motioned me to be silent, then said, low and rapidly in the Zulu tongue:

"'Umlongu, you pretended to-day that you could not speak our language. I did not believe you. Now tell me, do you understand our tongue? For if you do not I cannot help you, and I wish to do so. Quick, speak.'

"'I do,' I answered in Zulu. Something in her look and tone, low and muffled though the latter was, compelled me to believe that she spoke the truth; and even if she were deceiving me it mattered little now, no worse fate could be mine than that which I knew already awaited me.

"'Good,' she replied. 'Now take this knife and cut the thongs which bind you and help me to enlarge this opening. Obey me quickly and quietly, all depends on that—your life and mine, and that of Tozeni, my good brother.'

"I need not tell you that I obeyed her as quickly as, with my hands and feet benumbed and almost lifeless, was possible, and very soon between us we had made an opening large enough for her to enter. In one hand she held an assagai, in the other a calabash of sour milk. The latter she gave me, saying:

"'Drink it, it was all that I could bring. I have given Tozeni food for both of you, but you must not stop to eat till you are far from here.' Then silently as the panther she stepped out into the faint moonlight and glided swiftly forward, and I followed her noiselessly. In a few minutes we were outside of the village and under the shadow of a huge rock. Here she paused. 'Tozeni is yonder,' she said, point-

ing to a clump of trees at some distance. 'Join him, and travel south for one day, and then go for one day in the direction of the rising sun to avoid a village which lies one day's journey from here, then travel south again and you will be safe. No, do not stop to thank me,' she said imperatively, as I was beginning to murmur my thanks. 'Go at once.'

"'But you,' I asked. 'Are you safe? Will not your people kill you, if they find out what you have done?'

"'Yes, if they find out,' she replied, with a short laugh. 'But they will not find out. I have taken care of that.'

"'But why have you run such a risk for a stranger?' I inquired.

"'It was not for you, or only partly. It was for Tozeni. He is my brother, and he was always good to me long ago, when we lived at my father's kraal. My father used to beat me often, and he sold me away and married me to a man I hated. But Tozeni was always good to me, and when I set him free he said he would not go unless I saved his master too. They would kill me if they found it out, and I should not care much if they did. My life is black and bitter. I hate my husband and his mother, and his brothers and their wives, and it would not be much to die. But do not fear, master, no one will ever know. Now go.'

"'But,' I replied, loath to leave the brave, unhappy creature, if you can help others to escape, why can you not escape yourself? Come with us. I will find a home and a kind mistress for you in the Transvaal, and I will take care that you never want.'

"'No, no, master,' she answered, 'I hate my husband and all his people; but I love my children, and I will never forsake them. Go, Umlongu, and if you ever meet the good missionary, Mr. Allen, tell him how Nigua saved your life, and say to him that she has never forgotten all the good things he told her long ago in Natal. Now you must go; every moment you linger increases your danger and mine;' and then without another word she glided away and disappeared among the shadows."

"And then?" asked Hetty breathlessly, as he paused.

"Well, we followed her directions, and it was not long before we were over the border and safe in the Transvaal again, where I found our comrades with a large party just starting to attempt our rescue."

That was Hetty's first visit to Mr. Vere's studio, but it was by no means the last. Often after that she went there by its master's invitation to examine some one of his many curious treasures, to inspect a newly-completed picture, to sing with him or listen while he played the organ. Mr. Vere discovered, too, that she had a very decided talent for drawing. He advised her to cultivate it, and became her teacher, and the hour every morning spent in giving and receiving those lessons came to be looked forward to by both teacher and pupil as the pleasantest part of the day.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OLD "DOHL OS" THROWER—THE HORROR OF A GREAT DARKNESS.

ALETTE put her head in at the parlour door one morning as Hetty stood arranging a bunch of the beautiful scarlet and pale canary-coloured lilies which Tozeni had brought her from a distant kopje, and beckoned her young mistress out of the room.

"What is it, Alette?" she asked, surprised at the girl's mysterious manner.

"A dohl os thrower, Miss Hetty; he is in the kitchen."

"A dohl os thrower, what is that?"

"Why, doesn't Miss Hetty know? He is a man who throws dohl oses, and who can tell by the way they fall everything one wants to know."

"But what are dohl oses?"

"Bones; Miss Hetty knows the little bones that Kafir children play are spans of oxen."

"And what does he do with them?"

"He throws them, Miss Hetty, and speaks. Of course I don't know what he says; it is something *we* can't understand; but when he has finished he can tell you all you want to know, and I want to ask him how are all my people by the house."

Hetty laughed.

"And do you really believe in such nonsense?" she asked. "Do you really think he can tell you?"

"I *know* he can, Miss Hetty," the girl replied, in a tone of conviction. "Tozeni says he never lies."

"And he is here?"

"He is in the kitchen, and I want two shillings to give him, Miss Hetty."

"Oh! he can't tell you anything until he is paid, eh?"

"He *could*, Miss Hetty, but he won't, and he is right. We want to know things, and he can tell us; why should he take the trouble for nothing?"

"Why, indeed? Very well, here is the money, and I will go with you, and hear what he has to say;" and she followed Alette into the kitchen, where, seated in the middle of the floor calmly eating cold pumpkin with a wooden spoon, was the seer.

He was a venerable man of the Makatees tribe, tall and lean; his scant beard and hair were snow white, and Hetty thought his face the most expressionless she had ever seen, until he raised his eyes and looked at her, and then she almost started. They were large, clear, and lustrous, and seemed to look beyond her into her very soul. It seemed to her that the old man had read in that clear, bright glance all her thoughts, and that all her life, past, present, and future, had been revealed to him.

He dropped his eyes again and resumed his interesting occupation of pumpkin-eating. When he had finished he handed the empty dish to Tozeni, who had all the time been regarding him with an almost ludicrous mixture of awe and admiration, and asked him a question.

"The old man asks if the little missus wants him to tell her anything about the people she left in the town by the sea."

Hetty was startled for a moment by this seeming proof of the old man's knowledge, but recollecting that Tozeni had most probably told him that she had come from the Colony and had relatives living by the sea, she shook her head and pointing to Alette she said, "She wants him to tell her all about her people."

"You see, Miss Hetty," whispered Alette triumphantly, "he does know; no one told him where you came from;" and tremblingly she went forward and dropped into his hand the money Hetty had given her. "I want to know," she said, "how all my people are—my mother and father, and my brother."

Tozeni interpreted, and raising his glittering, black eyes the old man fixed upon her a long, searching, penetrating gaze which had such an effect upon her nerves that she dropped on to a seat and ducked her head under the table.

Tozeni looked much impressed, while Hetty, though conscious that all present would be shocked at her levity, could not refrain from laughing outright.

The old man, after calmly pocketing the money, proceeded to mark with a piece of chalk a circle on the floor, in the centre of which he seated himself, and, taking from a leather bag, highly ornamented with beads, buttons, and tags of monkey skin, a number of little bones, he with much solemnity placed them in a row in front of him, shaking his head and muttering some unintelligible jargon. Hetty, Tozeni, and the awe-struck Alette gathered round, eager, curious, and interested, while Mr. Vere, who had entered unperceived, rapidly sketched in the outlines of the picture. And in truth the scene was highly picturesque. The small room, with its great, rude fireplace, its smoke-blackened walls and ceiling, the grated window through which the sun fell in two broad, yellow bands upon the red ant-heap floor. Tozeni, his tall, muscular figure rigidly erect, his bare, black arms, with their heavy, brass bracelets and ornaments of snake skin folded lightly across his chest, his strongly-marked features wearing an expression of deep, intense interest, mingled with something of superstitious fear. Alette, in her bright orange-coloured skirt, pink jacket, and stiff white kapje, her fat, good-humoured countenance puckered up into a preternatural gravity, her little black eyes studying the old man's face as if it were the book of fate. Hetty, a great bunch of ferns and lilies still in her hands, her dainty, eager face looking all the more fair and beautiful by contrast with the swarthy ones around her; and in the midst, sitting within his magic circle, the white-haired seer, in his long red shirt, his long, lean arms adorned with thick rings of brass and ivory, his leopard skin kaross over his shoulder, his great, black, mystic eyes fixed first upon Alette's shrinking countenance and then upon his magic row of bones.

His first attempt to look into the distance was evidently fruitless, for he shook his head, and gathering up his bones returned them to the bag. Then taking from another bag a few more bones of the same kind and several shells, he threw them on the ground and waved his hands over them, then sat with his eyes closed for so long that Hetty fancied he had fallen asleep. But suddenly he looked up, and signing to Tozeni to interpret, he said to Alette.

"I have seen all the people you wish to know about.

Your mother is well now, but she has been ill; her hut was burnt down and she was nearly burned to death with it."

The girl uttered an exclamation of horror, but holding up his hand with a commanding gesture for her to be silent, he continued: "Nearly, not quite. She is living now with the old, old missus on the little farm by the sea. And your father is on his way to a big town, where he will not work with oxen and wagons any more, but will work far down in the earth to get stones which white men value."

"The Kimberley diamond mines," exclaimed Hetty involuntarily.

The old man did not notice the interruption except by a stern glance in her direction. "And your brother," he resumed, "drives a wagon now for the young master with the red hair. The young master is coming up here soon, and he will tell you that I have told you true."

"Baas Hans coming up here?" exclaimed Alette. "Miss Hetty, do you think it can be true?"

"It is possible that he is coming up with loads. Very likely the old man has heard so."

But at this Tozeni shook his head emphatically.

"No, little missus," he said. "The old man not been told, not heard. He never see this girl before; he knows not her people, only the dohl oses and the shells tell him. If little missus ask him he can tell her where she lived and what she did moons and moons ago, when she was so high," and he laid his broad, black hand on the table. "He can tell her where are all the friends she played with then. He knows all things, and he never lie."

"He never lie," repeated the old seer in his deep, loud voice.

He did not know the meaning of the words, but he guessed that they were spoken in vindication of his honour; and after repeating them over sternly several times, he collected his bones and stalked out of the room without waiting to bestow a word or glance upon any of the group.

Alette went out, and, seating herself on the low sod wall which enclosed the house, threw her apron over her head and began to meditate upon what she had heard. Hetty stood still in the middle of the floor watching the tall figure of the old seer as with a rapid step he hurried over the kopje.

"Well, Miss Hetty," said a voice beside her. "What do you think of our old, black soothsayer?"

"Why, Mr. Vere," she exclaimed, "I thought you were miles away."

"I returned half an hour ago, and I have been busy ever since sketching the interesting group I found assembled here," and he held up the sketch. "But you have not answered my question."

"What do I think of the soothsayer? I hardly know. What can I think, but that he is an imposter who makes a good trade of people's credulity and superstition."

"He is not that, at all events," he replied seriously, adding a few touches to his sketch as he spoke.

Hetty opened her eyes. "You don't mean to say that *you* believe in him!" she exclaimed, in accents of astonishment.

"I can only repeat what Tozeni says. I have never known him lie, or pretend to any knowledge or power he does not possess, and I have known him for a long time."

"And you really believe that he has second sight, like the old Highlanders in Scott's books?"

"I do not know whether he has second sight, or by what name to call his power; but power to see people of whom he has never heard, and to be cognisant of events which have happened or are happening at a distance, he certainly does possess. I have proved it on more than one occasion."

"Have you really?" she asked, beginning to regard with reverence the dusky old Makatees, whose tall, angular figure was thrown out in bold relief against the sky, as he sat on the top of a rocky bluff of the kopje smoking his little stone pipe. "How strange and wonderful!"

"It is, and like yourself I was at first very incredulous; but it was not long before I was convinced of his power. On one occasion we were on a hunting expedition, Tozeni and I and some travellers whom we had met, and were returning very successful, our pack-horses laden with skins. One stormy night, after hobbling our horses, we lay down to take a few hours' rest before the early start we intended to make, and in the night our horses were stolen, and when we awoke were nowhere to be found. Of course we looked for them everywhere, but in vain. After two days of fruitless search Tozeni came to me and asked me to permit him to go to the kraal where there lived an old Makatees "dohl os" thrower, and find out from him whither the missing animals had strayed or who had stolen them. I laughed at him, and reproved him for his folly in believing that the old man could know

anything about the matter. But in the end, after another day had been spent in looking for the horses, I yielded to his wish and decided to accompany him.

"The old man lived a considerable distance from the spot, and though we started at sunrise it was nearly dark when we reached his hut. When he came out to meet us, and all the people of the kraal gathered around to hear our business, I confess I felt very much ashamed of my folly in coming, and half inclined to return without telling the old man what my business really was. But, judge what was my surprise, when he came forward and said to Tozeni, 'You need not tell me your business; I know that your master and his friends have lost their horses, and yon have come to ask me where they are. Is it not so?'

"The triumphant Tozeni answered in the affirmative, and was about to describe the missing animals, when the old man held up his hand to silence him, and proceeded himself to describe them. So accurately and minutely did he do so, telling the number of days they had been lost and describing the place from which they had strayed, that I was convinced that either he or some of his people had stolen them, and I told him so. Whereupon all the people of the village, men, women, and children, broke out into such loud protestations of innocence and exclamations of shocked astonishment, that I could not for one moment suppose the old man, whom they evidently regarded with deep respect, to be guilty. Tozeni was also very much distressed at my incredulity and irreverence. Only the old seer himself was unmoved, and, when the tumult had somewhat subsided, he continued calmly:

"'I have not stolen your horses, neither have any of my people. But you need not trouble yourselves any more about them, for the friends whom you left behind are even now driving them up to your camp.' And then he described the faces of our companions and the place where they had found our horses. 'Go back,' he said in conclusion, 'and you will find them there, and your companions only waiting for your return to continue their journey.' And, Miss Hetty, to make a long story short, we returned without delay and found it exactly as he had said."

"But perhaps he had been told," suggested Hetty eagerly, very unwilling to believe in the old, black man's strange power.

"No, for the two men who had stolen them were quite unknown to him and quite ignorant of his existence, as I

afterwards proved. But, even supposing that he had been in league with them, and that they had described to him the animals they had stolen, how could he have been able to describe accurately the faces and dress of the men of our party who had recovered them? how could he have known exactly the hour they would return with the missing animals to our camp? and, above all, how could he have known instantly who Tozeni and I were, and what was our business? No, Miss Hetty, from wherever he derives his power, it is certain that he possesses it. Mnyema is no impostor."

Hetty was obliged to believe the strange story as Mr. Vere was the relater of it, and the last person in the world, she told herself, to be superstitious or fanciful, or to state what was not absolutely true in every respect, and the knowledge that this strange, gloomy-looking old man possessed such a wonderful, mysterious power made her feel very uncomfortable.

"It is very strange," she said presently. "And do you think that all he has been telling Alette about her people is true?"

"I am certain of it. Are you acquainted with the people with whom her friends are living?"

"The Niekerks? Ah, yes, we know them very well."

"Then it would not be hard to prove if he has spoken truly."

"No, very easy; and if, as he says, Hans Niekerk is coming up here, we shall know soon."

"I have not the slightest doubt that he has spoken truly. There are more things in earth and sky than are dreamed of in our philosophy, you know; and though we cannot understand the secret of his strange power, there can be no doubt that he possesses it, for, as I say, I have proved it more than once."

"It makes me feel very uncomfortable," Hetty declared.

"Why should it?"

"I don't know why it should, but it does; and, Mr. Vere, if he really has the power or gift, or whatever it is, of second sight—and I must believe he does after what you have told me—of what possible use are those bones and shells? I cannot bring myself to believe that they possess any virtue, or the power to bring up before his eyes distant scenes and faces."

Mr. Vere smiled and shook his head. "I do not know whether the bones possess any magic power," he said; "it is probable that they are used by the soothsayer merely for

the sake of effect, and in order to make a deeper impression upon the spectators. Understand me, Miss Hetty, I do not for a moment believe in all the old men and women—witch doctors, seers, or whatever they choose to call themselves—who go about with a bundle of bones, and make a living by imposing on the ignorance and superstition of their people; but old Mnyema's power is undeniable."

The fair, bright morning, turned into a dull, grey afternoon, and the dull afternoon deepened into a stormy evening. The rain fell in a continuous shower, the thunder rolled and echoed among the rocky kopjes, and the lightning flashed at intervals. But the storm and discomfort without only made the warmth and brightness of the little parlour all the more pleasant by contrast. Hetty and Mr. Vere were its only occupants, for Mr. Brown had gone to Pretoria that morning and had not returned; Oswald was in the kitchen listening to one of Tozeni's gruesome and graphically-told stories of Zulu warfare; and Mrs. Brown had left the room to make the cup of chocolate which she always took before retiring.

"What a wretched evening it is," exclaimed Hetty, going to the window and drawing back the curtain; "who would have expected it after such a lovely morning?"

"The fairest, brightest mornings often end in storm and darkness," he answered, going to her side, and speaking in so sad a tone that she knew he must be speaking metaphorically, as he often did.

"Oh, I hope not," she answered; "I hope that is not so. My morning has been so fair and bright—almost cloudless—do you think it will close in chill and darkness?"

"God forbid," he replied fervently. "No, Miss Hetty, I do not think it will. Not such storm and darkness as I was thinking of—the storm of passion recklessly indulged in, the chill of disappointment, the darkness of despair. *You* carry a talisman."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Religion—the only safeguard. Heaven forbid that your bright life should ever be shadowed by self-reproach, remorse, or trouble of any kind."

"I am not afraid," Hetty answered timidly. "I shall only have such sorrows as God sends me, and He knows best, and He can help me to bear them."

"Doubtless," he answered, smiling down into the eyes that were looking up with so much pity and earnestness

into his sad face. "But what of the sorrows He does not send, but which come to men through their own faults? What would you think of the man who in a moment of passion committed a crime, the memory and consequences of which followed him all the rest of his life, robbing him of every joy, brightness, and hope?"

"I should think that he was very much to be pitied."

"And very much to be blamed."

"Yes, of course to be blamed, but still more to be pitied. But, Mr. Vere, I can't think that one rash act could ruin a whole life, especially — especially if the person who committed it repented."

"But repentance cannot undo a crime."

"No, but it often leads a man to atone for a crime, does it not?"

"Doubtless; but there are crimes that cannot be atoned for, and sins which cannot be blotted out.—Merciful God! what is that?"

Hetty looked up in amazement and terror, his exclamation had been so sudden, so full of agony, and something that sounded like fear. His face had turned white to the lips, and his eyes, dilated with horror, were fixed upon something outside. Hetty's eyes followed the direction of his but she saw nothing. The rain was still falling; but a faint, misty moon had struggled through the clouds and lighted the sodden garden paths, the ghostly, dripping blue gums, and the rocky hill in the back ground; nothing else was visible.

Mr. Vere stood for a moment as if turned into stone, then he sank upon a chair, and covering his face with his hands he exclaimed aloud, "Am I haunted, or going mad? Must I lose my reason too? Oh, my God!"

Hetty dropped on her knees beside his chair.

"Oh, Mr. Vere, what is it?" she asked tremulously. "Are you ill? What is the matter?"

He did not answer, but a shudder shook his strong frame.

"Please tell me," she repeated. "Are you ill, or what is it?"

He uncovered his face then and Hetty started back, so full was it of suffering. She had never seen such a look on any face before; but then Hetty was acquainted only with the sunny side of life; she knew nothing of sorrow, crime, or suffering.

"Are you in trouble?" she asked, pitying from her soul

this man who was so handsome, clever, and accomplished, and who, by reason of some secret sorrow, could be made to suffer so intensely.

"In trouble!" he repeated "Heaven grant you may never know the meaning of such trouble. My poor child! how I must have frightened you to make you look like that. Forgive me, Hetty."

"I am not frightened; but something is the matter. Won't you tell me what it is?"

"It is nothing—nothing at least which need trouble you."

"But I can't help being troubled," she answered softly. "My friends' troubles must be mine always. Will you not, at least, tell me what you saw in the garden?"

He turned if possible paler, and covered his eyes with his hands again, as if to shut out some horrible sight, then looking up, he asked suddenly, "Did you see nothing?"

"No, nothing."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite. I saw nothing but the falling rain and the blue-gums."

"Then I could not have seen anything either. It must have been a fancy."

"But what did you fancy you saw?" she persisted in her intense pity and sympathy. "Won't you tell me?"

"Why should I trouble you with my fancies? It would only make you nervous. Hetty!" he exclaimed, suddenly taking her hands in his, which were cold as ice, and looking into her eyes with such passionate earnestness that poor Hetty shivered with fear. "Hetty! do you think, have you ever thought, since you have known me that I was a man likely to lose his reason? Do you think me in the least degree insane?"

Hetty's eyes dilated with emotion, and her hands trembled in his clasp.

"Do I think you are insane?" she repeated, scarcely daring to speak the terrible word aloud. "Of course not. How could I think so?"

"Because I begin to fear that trouble has unhinged my mind. Have you never noticed anything in me to lead you to think so?"

"Never, Mr. Vere, never. It would be impossible for any one to imagine such a thing," she answered, speaking all the more decidedly because his manner and words had

been so very very strange, and she felt a great fear lying cold at her heart.

"If I am not mad I am haunted," he said, speaking more to himself than to her. "Well, better so; better to lose life than reason, if it must be one or the other;" and he dropped her hands and leaned back in his chair as if all his strength had left him.

Hetty rose, and going out softly returned in a few minutes with a glass of wine, which she handed to him, saying almost imploringly, "Take it please, Mr. Vere."

"I will take it," he said, "because you have brought it. But I do not need it. I am not ill; I am ashamed—I cannot tell you how much ashamed—of being so weak. You will try and forget it, will you not? Try and think no more of all the foolish things I have said to-night—promise."

"I don't think I can promise that, because I could not forget if I tried; but I will never mention it again to you or anyone else if you do not wish it."

"I do not wish it. You are very kind to me, Miss Hetty, kinder than I deserve, and you must not let my troubles, all of which I brought upon myself, cast one shadow upon your bright young life. Good night."

"Good night," said Hetty wistfully. "Mr. Vere"—he came back again at once—"Mr. Vere, don't let this thought trouble you, you ought not, I am sure. It is so terrible, and —and I have heard——" she paused; she could not bring herself to finish the sentence.

"You have heard that if a man fancies he is losing his reason he dwells upon the horrible thought, and tortures himself with it until he does go hopelessly mad at last; is that it?"

"Yes. You are not going to do that, are you?"

"I hope not; but do not trouble yourself about me, my dear child; all I have to suffer I richly deserve, and I do not deserve one kind word or thought from you. If you knew all you would not bestow one upon me." And pressing her hand once more he was gone.

When he reached his own room he lighted the lamp, drew down the curtain with his eyes carefully turned away from the window; then he threw himself into a chair with a laugh that was horribly mirthless.

"Am I turning into a coward, too?" he asked himself bitterly. "Seeing visions! Afraid of a shadow! But did I see a face looking at me over the wall—a white face full

of reproach and menace? *His* face as I saw it then, as I have often seen it in dreams since. Did I see it? Has he come back from the land of spirits to haunt me? Pshaw! what a superstitious fool I am becoming. No, he is not come to haunt me, to warn me of death and judgment; a worse fate is in store for me—I am going mad. How I frightened that poor child to-night, and how horrified she looked at the bare idea of my being a madman. Dear, noble, warm-hearted Hetty, how little she dreams who and what I am. What would she say if she were told that the hand she takes so frankly is the hand of a——" He did not finish the sentence, but suddenly springing up he went into the inner room and returned with a small hand mirror. He held it up near the light and gazed long and earnestly into it, and pushing back his thick, wavy, brown hair, in which the threads of silver looked so strangely out of place, he said in a low voice, "Mine are not the eyes of a madman. I do not believe that I am going mad; I will not believe it. But if I am," he added, with curious inconsistency, "if I am to end my days a drivelling idiot, or a violent, raving maniac, I have richly deserved the punishment. I have brought it upon myself. And yet, O God! Thou knowest—Thou knowest that I never meant it—that I would give my life to undo that night's work. Pity me, spare me, O God! Take my life, but spare my reason."

All that night he never slept nor made a pretence of resting, but paced up and down the narrow room. Visions of the past, which was dead and yet whose ghost would not rest in the grave of oblivion, visions of the future as it would be, and as it might have been, tortured him, and refused to be banished.

Whatever was this man's sin?—whatever crime he had committed in his rash headstrong youth, he was surely paying its full price now—expiating it by anguish, and suffering, by long, sleepless nights, by torturing dreams, by days of loneliness and fruitless remorse, and now by a terrible dread, and the fear of a fate worse, ten thousand times worse, than death itself.

Several weeks passed quietly away, and Hetty might have forgotten her terror of that night but for the deeper, darker shadow which had rested on Philip Vere's face ever since. He was graver, sadder than even before.

On the morning following that rainy night she had gone out early in order to examine the spot where Mr. Vere had

fancied he saw whatever it was that had caused him such terrible emotion. The ground was soft and wet with the previous night's rain, and there she saw to her intense relief the prints of a man's feet. Then it was not the fancy of a diseased brain, not imagination; some one had been there. A great burden of fear and horror seemed to roll off her heart as she made the welcome discovery. At any other time the knowledge that some one had been prowling about the house late at night and peering at her over the garden wall—some one with burglarious, perhaps murderous, intentions—would have filled her with fear; but now she cared nothing at all for that. What could matter so much—what could be so awful as the fear which Vere had implanted in her mind and which had taken such firm possession of it?

Hetty took the earliest opportunity of telling him of the discovery she had made; but to her astonishment and dismay he only smiled in his sad way and shook his head.

"Those footprints may have been made there in the afternoon," he said.

"No, for if they had, the heavy rain we had in the evening would have washed them out. They must have been made after the heaviest rain had fallen."

"Perhaps so," he admitted. "But they may be the prints of Tozeni's feet, or those of some other native."

"That is absurd," she replied, almost angry with him for refusing to accept the footprints as a certain proof that a substantial reality had stood there the night before, and not a disembodied spirit or the creation of his own brain. "Tozeni and other natives seldom wear boots, never in wet weather," she declared; "and besides, these marks were not made by a native's foot, but by a small, neat boot, worn on a well-shaped foot."

"A good lawyer was spoiled in you, Miss Hetty," he answered, smiling at her arguments. "It may be as you say, but—but the face that I saw, or fancied I saw, was that of a man who died and was buried years ago."

After that day the subject was not mentioned by either of them, but Hetty knew that the haunting fear of insanity was ever before his mind, and her warm heart ached for him. She watched him furtively when he was not observing her, and listened when he spoke with ears sharpened by anxiety; but she never could detect any sign of mental weakness. The articles and essays, which she was always

permitted to read before he sent them away, were written as well, she thought even better than ever. He painted more than ever, drew and sketched, and prepared woodcuts for English illustrated magazines with indefatigable industry, and all his work was done well and thoroughly. He transacted all his business with his usual promptitude and exactness, and in those days he had a good deal of business connected with the many operations which were being carried out on his farm. He worked night and day, and scarcely ever rested. He tested his mental strength in every way, and could not but own to himself that there was nothing wrong. His brain was perfectly clear, his mind as strong and vigorous as ever; he was perfectly sane, and yet, if so, why had he suffered that strange hallucination? Why had he fancied he saw that dead man's face looking at him?

It was very seldom now that he spent an evening in the Browns' cosy parlour, very seldom that the sound of his organ was heard. He worked incessantly, fearing to give himself time for thought, which of all things he dreaded most.

Hetty longed to tell him that he was doing wrong, that he was doing the utmost to bring about the very thing he feared, but she had promised not to allude to the subject again, and she could not intrude upon his sorrow. She wished he would tell her mother his trouble, her mother who was so wise and good, and who would know just what to say to him, and who could, moreover, say a great deal that she, Hetty, could not. But he never did, and when Mrs. Brown, noticing his pale, worn looks, advised him to rest, and consult a doctor, he only said that he was in no need of medical advice, and worked harder than ever.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MEETING AS STRANGERS.

One afternoon Kathie and Pearl were seated under a clump of vaal-bushes. Kathie was embroidering a magnificent pattern of sunflowers on a slip of satin, which was destined to be made into a mantelshelf cover and presented as a wedding gift to Lena, and Pearl was absently picking to

pieces a bunch of wild flowers, the book she had been reading having fallen unnoticed to her feet.

"It is too bad," she exclaimed at length discontentedly. "All the money you got for your diamond having to go to pay the boys and settle the grocer's bill."

"It could not have been put to a better use, Pearl."

"No, I suppose not; but the boys need clothes so badly. Have we no more jewels that we can sell?"

"I don't think so. And who would sell them for us? I should not like to trouble Ambie again."

"No, but I was thinking that Mr. Bernhardt might. He is going to Kimberley next week, and he would do it, I know."

"I dare say he would not mind. Suppose you go and get the little casket and see what we have."

Pearl obeyed, and soon returned carrying a small carved box. Kathie took it, and opened one by one the little polished drawers.

"Here is Aunt Annie's emerald brooch," she said, holding the trinket up to the light, "and here is mamma's pearl and coral locket; but papa would not let us sell either of these, I know, and I should not like to do so myself. It would seem like sacrilege. These drawers only contain broken earrings and pinless brooches. But what is this? Here is something that we can sell, Pearl," and she held up a small diamond ring. I had forgotten all about it."

"Whose was it?"

"Grandmamma's. Grandpapa brought it to her from India; but she never wore it."

"And shall you ask Gabriel Bernhardt to sell it?"

"I don't know, I must ask papa first. It is not mine, you know, like the pearls, to do with as I please."

"It fits you beautifully though," said Pearl, slipping it on Kathie's finger and holding up her hand that the light might flash upon it.

Just then a long shadow was thrown across the grass at their feet, and, looking up, they saw a tall, shabbily-dressed woman approaching. Her languid, spiritless step spoke of more than physical weariness, her face was pale, and her hair hung down in a disordered mass.

"Why, it is Mrs. Roberts," exclaimed Kathie, rising and going forward to meet her. "I hope her little boy is not worse; Syd told me yesterday that he was ill."

"Oh, Miss Milner," exclaimed the woman, taking in her

thin, trembling fingers the hand Kathie held out, "Johnny is so sick; I don't know what to do."

"Is he worse, Mrs. Roberts?"

"Yes, he is getting worse all the time. Oh, I wish you would come back with me, Miss Milner, and look at him. I don't know what to do for him. I'm half distracted."

"I will go with you at once," said Kathie, pityingly. "He is not alone now, is he?"

"No, a young fellow who is working near our tent promised to look to him till I got back. Will you come now?"

"Yes, at once. What is the matter with Johnny, Mrs. Roberts?"

"Oh, it's nothing catching—nothing you need be afraid of," she answered eagerly, fancying that was Kathie's reason for asking. "He's just pining away;" and the poor woman wiped away her tears with her coarse, soiled apron. She knew, alas, that the cause of her child's illness was the months of privation and exposure he had endured; that he was dying for want of the wholesome, nourishing food she had been unable to give him.

Kathie's eyes grew dim with sympathetic tears. She knew that for a long time the Roberts' finds had been very trifling, and she more than suspected that the few shillings Mrs. Roberts had earned by needlework had been spent by her worthless husband on drink. Very keenly she felt her helplessness, and her inability to get for the poor woman the little dainties her sick child needed. Never did her own poverty seem so hard to bear as when she found herself in the presence of still greater poverty, which she was forced to see and powerless to relieve.

She followed Mrs. Roberts, scarcely able to keep up with her quick steps, so eager was the poor mother to return to her boy before he should awake and miss her. Pearl, after returning the little jewel casket to its place, hurried after them. The Roberts' tent stood in the heart of the little camp, and though Kathie had known that there was in Hebron want, squalor, and misery compared with which their own poverty was affluence, she was not prepared for what met her eyes when she entered it. The tent was very small, and the roof and sides were full of large holes which gave easy entrance to rain, wind, and dust. In the middle of the room was a broken wooden bedstead on which lay the sick child, supported by pillows covered with torn cases of dirty red print; a narrow, ragged counterpane was over the

bed, and through the great holes in it could be seen the single, threadbare blanket below. A little stretcher stood on one side of the tent and on the other was a bucket half full of coarse meal; a box on which stood a dirty dented tin teapot; some chipped, cracked plates; a broken knife or two, and a few tin pannakins; and these, besides a couple of crazy chairs, were all the room contained. Kathie and Pearl glanced at each other. What chance could there be of the child's recovery in a place like that?

Seated by the bedside, his eyes shaded by his hand, was the young digger of whom Mrs. Roberts had spoken. He rose from his seat when they entered, and as his eyes met hers Kathie recognised the young man who had startled her with his unaccountable likeness to some one on the evening of their arrival at the "New Rush." Pearl looked up at him too, and she knew instantly that it was the portrait in Kathie's locket that he resembled. There were the same dark blue eyes which in the portrait looked black, the heavy straight black lashes, and the same clear-cut features. Very like, but the moment he moved or spoke the likeness became far less striking. His face too, though handsomer than the photographed one, whose presence in Kathie's locket had vexed and puzzled Pearl so sadly, was darker, haughtier, and lacked the earnestness and self-control of the other.

Pearl glanced half nervously at her sister, but Kathie's eyes were fixed on the face of the sick boy, which she saw but dimly through a mist of tears. She had seen little of serious illness, but she knew enough to feel sure that the child's days were numbered. His great, hollow, grey eyes had black circles under them; his lips were pinched and blue, and his face was painfully thin. Mrs. Roberts looked round the tent expectantly.

"Hasn't my husband come in yet?" she asked, adding in a worried tone, as the young man answered in the negative, "Oh, dear! I wish he would come, he ought to be here. Johnny's asking for him all the time, and it seems to worry him so when I tell him his father hasn't come home yet. Do you happen to know where he is?"

"Not for certain; but I fancy he went into Hebron last night. I saw him on Brandt's donkey-cart late in the evening."

"Oh dear," sighed the woman, "I wonder how I could let him know how bad Johnny is. He ought to be here."

"I am going into town for my post, and I will tell Roberts that the boy is ill, and you want him at home. Shall I?"

"Oh, if you will, Mr. Wood, I shall be so much obliged to you. Roberts ought to know; he'd never forgive himself if—if anything happened to Johnny while he was away," she added, her voice sinking to a whisper.

"I'll tell him, then. Is there anything else I can do for you while I am there?"

Mrs. Roberts shook her head, and he went out, little dreaming what a blow to poor Pearl's hopes the simple utterance of his name had been. This, then, was Mr. Wood, the handsome, gentlemanly young digger of whom Lena had told her, and in whom she had hoped and believed she should find her own lost brother, Pearl could have wept with the bitterness of the disappointment. How glad she was that she had not spoken of it to her father or Kathie. How grateful she was that the disappointment was hers alone.

Kathie persuaded the weary, worn-out mother to lie down on the little stretcher, and she busied herself about the tent, trying to reduce it to something like order, while Pearl went home to fetch from their own scanty store such small comforts as might be of use, and which they could offer without wounding Mrs. Roberts' sensitiveness.

Kathie had just finished "tidying up" the tent; she had carried outside the pile of old sieves, sacks, and "baby" wire that filled one corner, washed up the chipped, broken crockery, shaken up Johnny's hard pillows, spread his covers more smoothly over him, and was just sitting down to rest, when she was surprised by the unceremonious entrance of Mrs. Bain.

The lady came into the tent, her stiff dress rustling so loudly that the sick boy moaned and turned on his pillow.

"Miss Milner, you here?" she exclaimed in the loud, clear voice which had never known the soft modulations of sorrow or sympathy. "Why, what brings you?"

"He is ill," Kathie replied in a low tone, motioning towards the bed, and glancing apprehensively at the stretcher where Mrs. Roberts lay, and feeling afraid of what the visitor might say next.

"Sick, is he?" said Mrs. Bain; and then dropping her voice to a whisper, which, however, was distinctly audible, she added: "Well, I'm not surprised; the child has been starved—literally starved to death."

The poor mother on the stretcher did not move or speak, but Kathie saw, by the long shiver of agony that ran through her frame, that she had heard the thoughtless whisper. Alas! she knew how true it was.

"He does look bad," continued Mrs. Bain, shaking her head. "I don't think he'll get over it—do you?"

"Oh, hush!" said Kathie imploringly. "She will hear you."

"Oh, I thought she was asleep. Does she know that there's a doctor staying in Hebron? He might do something for the child."

Mrs. Roberts started up. "A doctor staying in town" she cried eagerly. "Oh, I wonder if he would come out here and see Johnny?"

"I dare say he would," replied Mrs. Bain patronisingly. "I'm going back at once, and I'll ask him to come out."

"Yes," said Mrs. Roberts, quite forgetting the thanks Mrs. Bain evidently expected. "But he would not be able to find the place unless some one could come with him to show him the way."

"No, he would not find the way easily if he is a stranger," said Kathie. "But I have thought of a plan, Mrs. Roberts. My brother Sydney can go. I will go home at once and send him with a note to the doctor."

"Thank you, I *should* be glad," said Mrs. Roberts gratefully. "But how will the little boy go? He can't walk."

"No, but he can borrow one of Mr. Brandt's mules. Syd can ride anything."

"Tired though she was, Kathie walked home with a quick step, and after writing her note, and watching Sydney ride away at a breakneck pace on the huge, white mule which the good-natured digger had lent him, she went to her father's claim to tell him that she had promised to stay all night with Mrs. Roberts.

Mr. Milner was standing, sorter in hand, at his tub; his face wearing the harassed, weary expression which had grown habitual to it.

"Have you found anything, papa?" she asked, as she sprang down the bank on to the heap of wet gravel, and stood beside him.

"No, Kathie; and I begin to think there is nothing here to find. We shall have to move back to Hebron; this place is a sell," he answered, turning listlessly to the fresh sieveful of gravel which the Kafir had just turned over. Kathie

watched him in silence for a minute or two, then she told him the errand on which she had come.

"I don't half like your going, dear," he said unwillingly. "What is the matter with the child?"

"I don't know exactly. The chief cause of his illness seems to be exposure and want of proper food."

"It is not fever, or anything infectious then?"

"Oh, no, papa, nothing of that kind. I shall not be running any risk."

"I don't like your going," he said again, "you do not look fit to watch all night by a sick bed; "but I suppose you cannot leave the poor woman alone. Is Roberts at home?" he added suddenly.

"No, papa," she replied, prudently omitting to say that most probably he would be at home before very long. She stayed in the claim a short time longer, then wished her father "good night." He sighed as he kissed her, and telling her to "take care of "herself," turned back to his work again.

How his tall figure drooped, how wearily he bent over his work, how sadly changed he was from his strong, genial self, Kathie thought, as she walked back to Mrs. Roberts' tent, sad and subdued, and troubled about many things. But Mrs. Roberts, whom she found outside busy making a fire, saw nothing of all this. What she saw was only a calm, bright face, which gave promise of abundant sympathy and very efficient help, and which somehow gave her a feeling of rest and confidence.

"It is so good of you to come," she said gratefully. "I don't know what I should have done if I had had to spend another night alone with Johnny in the way he is. I should have gone mad, I believe."

"I am very glad you came for me," said Kathie heartily. "But surely you were not quite alone last night?"

"Yes, I was; Mr. Wood did come in once and offer to sit with Johnny while I rested; but, though he is very kind, he's haughty and abrupt like, and I never feel comfortable with him, and when I said I didn't want to rest, he just went out and left me. I don't know how to thank you for promising to stay to-night."

"Don't thank me, Mrs. Roberts, you would do that much for any one, and I don't want any thanks. Oh, I see you have made tea, let me pour it out. I have brought sugar and milk, and a few things which I thought might be of

use. It is so far to the store you know, and there is no one here whom we could send for anything."

Mrs. Roberts looked at her affectionately, she so thoroughly appreciated the thoughtful kindness, as well as the delicacy which spared her pride.

Kathie busied herself cutting thin slices of bread and butter, pouring out the tea, talking all the time in subdued but cheerful tones, and making the tired woman eat and drink, and Mrs. Roberts rose evidently refreshed.

It is said that mind is superior to matter, and so undoubtedly it is; but it is also true that the mind will not long remain strong and vigorous if the body's needs and wants are slighted and neglected, and Mrs. Roberts felt herself a different woman after she had taken food and drink—for the first time that day—she felt more rested, and even more inclined to be hopeful about Johnny.

"Now," said Kathie cheerfully, when she had washed up the cups and plates and put away the bread, "Now we are ready for the doctor. If Syd rides all the way to Hebron and back at the pace he started, it will not be long before he comes."

The time passed, however, and trees and tents began to throw long shadows across the grass and gravel, and the doctor did not arrive, and Mrs. Roberts became restless and uneasy, and Kathie began to grow anxious on Syd's account. To be sure he could ride well, but might not the great, imperfectly trained mule have proved more than he could manage?

Presently the boy woke, and Kathie went outside to make some fresh tea for him. She had made it, and was just about to carry it inside when the sharp sound of horses' hoofs caused her to look up. Two horsemen were approaching, one was her brother Sydney, the other—— What was there about that other that made her eyes dilate with surprise and something like terror that drove all the colour from her face and made the hand that held the teacup tremble like a leaf? It was four years since she had seen him; he was very much changed, but she knew instantly, without the shadow of a doubt, that it was Graham Keith.

How could she meet him? She could not meet him. She would go home at once. These were Kathie's first thoughts. But the next moment she knew it could not be. She would not run away from him; why should she? She need not feel humiliated in his presence. All the meanness and false-

hood had been his. It was for him to feel ashamed, not for her. What had brought him to Hebron of all places in the world? She had thought he was hundreds of miles away, enjoying his inheritance of Home Woods. She watched him as he slowly dismounted, noticing, as we always do notice, in moments of intense feeling, the merest trifles, how long the shadows had grown, and what a peculiar red glow burned in the western sky.

He went into the tent, Syd rode home, and Kathie stood still looking into the dying fire. She knew that Mrs. Roberts would be wondering why she did not come in, but she felt that she would rather do anything in the world than go in while he was there. It must be done, however, and summoning all her resolution and all her pride, she went into the tent.

Graham was standing by the bedside talking in a low voice to Mrs. Roberts. How the well-known, once-loved voice struck on her ear and heart with a thrill that was the keenest pain.

He was standing in the shadow, but the light of the setting sun fell full upon her as she came slowly into the tent, and in the one quick, eager glance he gave her as he bowed gravely, he took in every detail—the flushed, tired face that wore such a very proud expression just then; the well-worn, much-mended dress, and the diamond ring which she had forgotten to remove when Mrs. Roberts called her. She returned his bow with a grave, unrecognising politeness, as if he had been the veriest stranger.

"She is a consummate actress," thought Graham, as he met the steady, grave gaze of the hazel eyes, and his memory went back to the autumn afternoon when they had walked together under the soft-falling beech leaves, when they had belonged to each other, and the future had threatened no shadow.

Again and again his eyes wandered to where she stood as he talked gravely to Mrs. Roberts. The shabby frock, the worn shoes, and the sun-browned hand on which the diamond glowed and flashed like a point of flame, were a revelation to him. Kathie poor and shabby was a new idea. He had always seen her so tastefully and richly dressed, and somehow he thought she looked out of place in that washed-out, old cotton frock, and in that mean squalid tent. He had longed so to see her, and, after all, the sight of her had brought more pain than pleasure.

After promising to send some medicine in an hour or two, and to come again himself in the morning, he rode away, leaving Kathie feeling as if the whole world had suddenly turned round the wrong way.

That was a long night; very bright and still outside, where nothing broke the silence but the wild, bird-like singing of some Koranna children on the other side of the kopje, and the faint, far-off murmur of the river. A great, golden moon sailed through the cloudless sky, and shone down through the torn canvas into the tent where Kathie and Mrs. Roberts watched beside the dying boy, for his father never came. About ten o'clock the man Graham had dispatched with the medicine arrived. Kathie administered a dose, and soon afterwards the child fell into a heavy sleep. Then Kathie persuaded Mrs. Roberts to lie down and rest, and took up her own station by the bedside, and fell into a long fit of musing.

She could not divest herself of a feeling of unreality as she sat there looking out into the white moonlight, and watching the tremulous black shadows cast by the vaal-bushes. So unreal seemed the events of the afternoon that she could almost have persuaded herself that she had fallen asleep, and dreamed that she had seen and spoken to Graham Keith. But no, there stood the bottle of medicine, and the little note in which he had written his directions, and which was signed in the clear, rather peculiar hand that she remembered so well, forcing her to believe that it was true. It *was* true; Graham was here. Why had he come? And then she fell to thinking how changed, how ill he looked, and wondering what was the meaning of that black band on his sleeve; she hoped it was not worn for the mother he had loved so well.

Mrs. Roberts slept on, and the sick boy scarcely moved all through the long hours while the night slowly deepened into morning. At length the loud crowing of a cock close to the tent door roused Kathie from her sad reverie to the knowledge that the night was passed and another day was begun. At the same moment Mrs. Roberts sprang up exclaiming, self-reproachfully:

"Oh! however could I have slept so long? Why didn't you wake me? You must be tired to death."

Kathie hastened to assure her that she was not tired, and expressed her pleasure that Mrs. Roberts had had the rest she so much needed.

"He looks much better, doesn't he?" said Mrs. Roberts going to the bedside and speaking in a tone of glad hopefulness. "He's sleeping much more quietly."

"He doesn't seem so restless," was all Kathie could reply, for she saw that though his sleep was quieter, his breath was fainter, his pulse weaker, and that the flush which had burned in his cheeks the evening before had faded to a death-like whiteness. But she could not tell the poor mother that she feared she was deluding herself with a false hope.

At sunrise Kathie went home, and Pearl, after insisting that she should lie down and rest for an hour or two, and remaining to see that she did, went to take her place at Mrs. Roberts's. She had not been there long when Dr. Keith came. Pearl looked up at him as he entered, and for a moment she almost thought she must be dreaming. Was she growing foolish and fanciful? Yesterday she had thought she saw in the young digger, Wood, a striking resemblance to that mysterious portrait in Kathie's locket; and now she imagined that the original himself was standing before her. But the second glance convinced her that it was no fancy. It was the same face, only older, graver, and worn and pale as from ill health, or trouble, or both, as the face in the portrait had not been. Pearl decided that if the owner of those steadfast, truthful eyes could commit a mean or dishonourable action, she would never trust a face again. And Graham, looking at Pearl, knew at once that this must be the "little sister" of whom Kathie had so often spoken to him; the clever, high-spirited Pearl, to teach and train whom she had felt herself so incompetent. How and in what manner had that training been done he wondered, as he looked at the face, which was prettier than Kathie's, but which lacked the expression of mingled gentleness and firmness, which had struck him so forcibly in the latter the evening before. Had Kathie taught her young sister to be as sordid and mercenary as she had proved herself to be? But whatever the sisters were in other respects, Graham decided that in a sick-room they were perfect—quick, tender-handed, noiseless in their movements, and seeming to know by intuition what ought to be done—they were admirable nurses.

In the evening Kathie came back to watch through the night with Mrs. Roberts. It was late, the boy was sleeping, and Mrs. Roberts resting in the stretcher, when Kathie

heard stumbling, unsteady steps outside, and the next moment the flap was raised and Roberts shuffled in. He had been drinking hard for days past, and Kathie shuddered at the terrible spectacle he presented, with his white face, about which his long, unkempt hair fell; his heavy, blood-shot eyes, and his clothes covered with mud and dust. She felt somewhat alarmed, too, as she saw that he was quite drunk now, and scarcely responsible for his words or actions. As he came in he stumbled over a chair and fell heavily, which accident drew from him a volley of such terrible oaths as made her blood run cold. She held up her hand and pointed warningly to the bed where the child lay. He glared so savagely at her that for a moment she thought he was about to strike her with the great, knotted vaal-bush stick he carried. But suddenly changing his mind he staggered over to the stretcher where his wife was, laid a heavy hand upon her arm, and fiercely ordered her to "get up." Kathie was terrified as she saw the savage fury with which he looked down at her, but she dared not speak. Interference would, she knew, in his present state, make him only the more fierce and brutal. Mrs. Roberts sprang up in terror, and then, recognising her husband, she exclaimed:

"Oh, George, have you come at last? Johnny has been wanting you."

"Where's Johnny?" he demanded sullenly.

She pointed to the bed, adding briefly, "He's very sick."

"He ain't no more sick than I am," he declared, going up to the bed. "Don't tell me any of your lies, now. What do you expect to get out of me by that, eh?"

"Nothing at all. He is sick. Can't you see for yourself?"

"It's a lie," he repeated doggedly. "He's as well as I am, and a jolly sight more so, for I've had a splittin' headache for the last three days. And," he added, raising his voice, "Brandt tells me you've had a doctor feller foolin' round the boy. Is it true?"

"Yes, it is."

"And how do you think I'm a goin' to pay doctors' bills? I've got no money if you have. Did you send for him?"

"No," replied Kathie, interrupting her as she was about to answer in the affirmative; "I sent for him."

"You did? It was like your cheek then, whoever you are," he said, with a furious look, which, however, Kathie

met and returned steadily. "But she told you too," he went on, "and I'll pay her for it; I will, or my name's not George Roberts;" and raising his stick he brought it down heavily about his wife's head and shoulder's, striking at the same time, though unintentionally, the sick child upon his head. Kathie sprang up, and with one arm lifted him from the bed and with her other hand caught hold of the stick, which the wretch, who was beside himself with drunken rage, had raised to strike his wife again.

"How dare you—are you mad?" she exclaimed. "Would you kill her?"

"Yes, I would," he roared with an oath, "and I'll kill you too if you interfere with me;" and he looked as if he would willingly have put his threat into execution, but fortunately help was at hand. Just at that moment Graham Keith came in. One glance served to reveal to him the state of the case, and the next moment the stick was wrenched from him and flung outside, and he himself forced into a seat.

Kathie sat down with the child still in her arms, and began tenderly to soothe his cries of pain and terror.

After administering some medicine to him, and persuading Mrs. Roberts to lie down again, Graham took a cup of water, and pouring into it some drops from a small phial which he took from his pocket, handed it to Roberts with the brief command, "Drink it."

The man took it, and though he resented the peremptory tone, and glared savagely at Graham, such is the power of a strong will and a calm, steady gaze, that it never entered his mind to disobey; he took the cup in his unsteady hand and swallowed the draught.

"Now come with me;" and Roberts rose and followed him out of the tent and into the still moonlight.

"I did not know before," began Graham, speaking in a low tone, but very clearly and distinctly, "I did not think that there was a man living who would be brute enough to strike his wife by the bedside of his dying child."

"Johnny ain't dying," he muttered, in a dogged, sullen tone, and staring at the doctor with a pitiful mixture of ferocity and imbecility. "He ain't going to die, and if you kill him with any o' your doctor's stuff, you'll pay for it, that's all, and so I tell you."

Graham went back into the tent, and returned with a bundle of grain-bags which he had found there and his own

overcoat. He threw the former down under a bush, and, motioning him to lie down upon them, spread his overcoat over him. Under that cloudless sky, in that pure, dry air, he could take no harm, and might be safely left to his drunken sleep. He walked up and down near at hand until he saw that the drug which he had administered had taken effect and the drunkard had fallen into a heavy sleep. He stood looking down at him for some minutes with a mixture of pity and disgust; then he went back into the tent.

Mrs. Roberts lay still, sleeping the heavy sleep of exhaustion; Kathie sat still at the head of the bed, supporting the child in her arms. She had sat so long in the same position that she was growing very weary, but not for the world would she have disturbed or aroused the sleeping child. Graham noticed the pale face and compressed lips which testified to her weariness, and without a word he lifted the boy from her arms, and laid him on the bed.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she exclaimed vexedly. "You have awakened him."

"He had to be moved sooner or later," he told her, "and you could not have held him in that position many minutes longer."

Kathie did not answer; she took Johnny's little hot hand in hers, and talked to him gently and soothingly, until the heavy lids closed over his hollow, brilliant eyes once more.

The hours passed. Graham stood motionless with folded arms at the foot of the bed, and Kathie sat still, with wide, wakeful eyes, which persistently avoided the side of the room where he stood.

The grey dawn was breaking when a change came over the child's face—that look which even those who have never seen it before cannot mistake.

"He is dying," whispered Graham. "Will you wake his mother?"

Poor mother! to be roused from her short rest only to bid her child farewell for ever. Very unwilling was Kathie to wake her, but it had to be done. She touched her lightly on her shoulder, and spoke her name. Mrs. Roberts woke instantly, and glancing at her child's face uttered a cry of despair. That one glance told her all. She sprang up, and fell on her knees by the bedside, burying her face in the pillows.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "Could I not have kept *him*? He is all I have left."

Graham compressed his lips, and Kathie turned away to hide the tears which no effort of hers could keep back.

Presently the boy's eyes opened. "Mother, where are you?" he asked. "It's so dark, I can't see you."

"I am here, my darling."

"And you're crying, mother. What for?"

"You're so sick, my boy; mother can't help crying."

"Am I going to die?" the child asked suddenly, in a startled voice.

The poor woman did not answer. She could not; but her face of agony was pitiful to see.

Graham bent over the child and whispered gently, "You are going to Jesus, my boy. You are ready, are you not?"

"Yes, I think I'm ready," replied the boy slowly, lifting his great mournful eyes to the young man's face. "But I don't want to leave mother behind."

"It will not be for long, Johnny. Mother will come to you."

"And father? Do you think father'll come too?"

"I hope so."

"But father often does things he oughtn't. There's no harm in saying it, now I'm going to die, is there?"

"No harm at all. We all do things we ought not, very often. But God is always ready to forgive us, if we only ask Him."

"You'll tell father to ask, won't you, mother?" said the faint voice, and brokenly Mrs. Roberts promised.

Then the boy's eyes closed, and for a few minutes he seemed to sleep, then opening them suddenly, he asked, "Are you quite sure I'll go to heaven? I've tried to——"

The sentence was never finished. He fell back on the pillow, and his eyes closed, never more to open in this world. The short, troubled life was over; the gentle, uncomplaining spirit was with God.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GRAVE UNDER THE VAAL-BUSHES.

THE few diggers who left their work two afternoons later, in order to follow little Johnny Roberts to his lonely grave under the vaal-bushes, were gathered around the Roberts' tent when Kathie reached it.

There was no one in the tent but Mrs. Roberts. She was standing gazing down into the little face which was so soon to be hidden from her for all time with a depth of yearning anguish impossible to describe. Kathie put into her hands the branch of white flowers which she and Pearl had taken a long walk into Hebron to obtain from Lena's garden. The woman thanked her gratefully, but without moving her eyes from the child's face.

"Miss Bernhardt would have come to see you herself, but she is not well," said Kathie. "She wished me to ask you to go and spend a few days with her."

Mrs. Roberts shook her head. "She is very kind, but I could not go away now," she replied.

"She thinks the change and rest would be good for you, and I am sure they would, Mrs. Roberts; I wish you would go."

"No, I couldn't. I wouldn't leave my husband for the world just now. You mayn't think it, Miss Milner, seeing the way he went on the other day, but he thought all the world of Johnny; he's quite heartbroken, and he'd go to the bad altogether if he was left to himself."

After that Kathie would not have uttered a word to dissuade her; she merely said gently, "I'll tell Miss Bernhardt that you will go some other time, and you will come to us and rest sometimes, will you not?"

"Yes, I will, and thank you, Miss Milner. But I feel as if the only place where I'll be able to rest will be by his grave. Oh, my boy! my boy! two days ago you were alive and speaking to me, and now I am talking of your grave;" and burying her face in her thin hands she burst into a wild passion of weeping. She did not weep long, however; with a stern self-command she forced back the tears, saying half bitterly, "I needn't cry now; there'll be time enough for that when he's gone altogether. Is the doctor here?"

"Yes, I saw him outside."

"I'm glad he's here. You can't think how kind he's been, Miss Milner; he's been to see us twice since—since that night, and he talked so nicely to Roberts. I believe if he hadn't Roberts would have just rushed off in his misery and took to drinking worse than ever. I can't be thankful enough that it was him, and not one who would have despised us for our poverty and mean way of living; he's been *so* kind and helpful and sympathetic."

Kathie did not answer. "Kind, helpful, and sympa-

thetic," that was what she had always believed him to be. He could be all that, and more, when his pride did not stand in the way; and a scornful smile curved her lips as she remembered how very "helpful and sympathetic" he had shown himself towards her in the days of her sorrow and humiliation.

"He has promised to try and get a situation of some kind in Kimberley for my husband," continued Mrs. Roberts. "It is very kind of him to put himself to so much trouble for strangers, isn't it?"

"Very kind," replied Kathie; then, fearing that Mrs. Roberts would attribute her want of enthusiasm about the doctor to a lack of interest in her, she added, "I am very glad; it will be so much nicer for you than living here and working for nothing."

Mrs. Roberts was about to reply, when the flap was raised and her husband entered, and Kathie almost started back at the man's haggard, hopeless face, as, without seeming to notice her presence or that of his wife, he went up to the coffin. Little as she liked and much as she blamed him, she could not help a great wave of sorrowful pity rushing to her heart as he hung over the child—the child who, perhaps, but for his weak, cowardly indulgence in a base, degrading appetite, might have been alive and well. Shame, remorse, and despair were stamped upon his face.

All at once she saw him raise his eyes and unsteady hands to heaven, and she wondered if, in his dead child's solemn, holy presence, he was registering a vow to lead a different life, and silently breathing a prayer that, if so, he might have strength to keep it, she went out, leaving the husband and wife alone with their dead child.

Presently Gabriel Bernhardt, who had been asked to read the burial service, arrived, and the small procession started, It wound along for some time among the rocks and shrubs, and stopped at last on the sloping side of a grassy hill, where the little grave had been dug by the child's father and Mr. Wood.

The burial service was read in Gabriel's low voice, the coffin lowered, a few wild flowers strewn upon it, the grave was filled up and covered over, and the few followers dispersed.

Roberts went at once to Dr. Keith's side as if there he felt safe from himself, and Kathie, loath to leave his wife to walk home alone, went to her where she still stood motionless

beside the newly-made grave. Gabriel Bernhardt joined them and very kindly gave and seconded his sister's invitation to Mrs. Roberts to spend a few days with them. She gratefully declined; she did not tell him her reason for doing so as she had told Kathie, but he knew enough of their family history to guess it.

"Are you going home now?" he asked Kathie.

"Yes; but first I am going to walk back with Mrs. Roberts."

"I have a message for you from Lena," he said. "I will give it to you when you come back;" and he walked away to join Pearl and Mr. Milner, who were already on their way home.

"I did not see Mr. Wood here," said Mrs. Roberts as she and Kathie walked slowly back to the camp.

"He was not here," replied the latter.

"I wonder why he didn't come? He has often been kind to me, and he always seemed fond of Johnny. Only yesterday he came to look at him, but he wouldn't go inside because he heard some one speaking to my husband in the tent. I told him it was only the doctor, but he wouldn't go in. He's a queer man, and seems to be half afraid of strangers; he never mixes with the other diggers. That must have been why he didn't come to the funeral. I don't think he meant any slight to us."

"I am sure he didn't," said Kathie. "I wonder why he avoids all intercourse with the other diggers; as you say, it is strange."

"Yes, he never has anything to do with them. It's pride, I think, for it's easy to see that he's come down in the world. He's been brought up and educated very much above the common, I'm sure."

"He seems to be a gentleman, certainly," said Kathie, continuing the subject because she saw that Mrs. Roberts was forcing herself to talk of indifferent things, and not because she felt much interest in the hard, defiant-looking, and abrupt-mannered young digger. "He reminds me of some one I have seen, but I do not remember who it is."

"He resembles the doctor," said Mrs. Roberts.

"The doctor—Doctor Keith?"

"Yes, didn't you notice it? He's got the same dark blue, almost black eyes, and dark complexion, only his hair is light and the doctor's dark. They are so much alike that if it wasn't ridiculous I would say they were related."

Kathie was startled. Of course it was Graham Keith whom the young digger resembled. How strange that she had not seen it at once. Like the doctor! Of course, and so like that Kathie was sure it could not be a mere chance resemblance. Was he some erring member of the Keith family who had gone astray, and whom in their pride they had cast out from among them? she wondered bitterly.

"He is wonderfully like Dr. Keith," continued Mrs. Roberts, "but his expression is different; he looks like one who has found everything go against him for so long, that he has grown hardened, and has given up expecting things to go better. I know that look and that feeling."

Kathie left Mrs. Roberts at the door of her tent and started with a slow step homewards. She felt very tired with her two nights of watching, anxiety, and excitement; and the long walk of nearly eight miles she had taken before sunrise that morning, to get flowers to place around little Johnny, had tired her exceedingly. Her eyes were heavy, her head ached. She had not felt the weariness as long as there was anything to do, but now that all was over, and she had time to think of herself, she found that it was mastering her, and she almost hoped that she would find Gabriel gone when she reached home, she felt so little like talking even to him. More than anything she wanted time to rest and think, her head seemed to be in a whirl. Graham's sudden, unexpected appearance at Hebron had startled and surprised her beyond measure. She could not endure the thought of meeting him every time she went out. In his presence she had been perfectly cool and calm; she had looked and spoken to him as if he had been a stranger. "A consummate actress," he had thought her. That her quiet, rather haughty indifference cost her a strong effort, he never guessed. But she felt that she could not meet him again, and as long as he remained in Hebron she was in constant danger of doing so. Why had he come? she wondered impatiently. Surely she had enough to bear without any additional trouble. She told herself that she was weak and foolish, that she ought not to feel pained and humiliated in Graham Keith's presence, but she did; she could not help the feeling, and she longed and almost prayed that he would leave the diggings soon.

So engrossed was she by her own sad and perplexing thoughts, that she did not hear Gabriel Bernhardt's approaching footsteps, nor see him until he stood before her.

"You were so long in coming," he said, smiling "that I thought you must have lost your way."

"No," she answered, returning the smile with an effort. "I am in no danger of losing my way, I have travelled it too often lately to do that."

"Yes, Miss Pearl tells me that you sat up watching for two nights with Mrs. Roberts You must be very tired."

"I think I am a little, though I did not feel in the least tired until just now. Pearl and I took such a long walk this morning."

"Too long. I wish you had permitted me to drive you home, even though the only vehicle at my disposal was a mule-cart."

"It was not the cart I objected to, nor the mules," she answered. "It was not pride which made me refuse your kind offer, I assure you."

"What was it then?"

"Nothing but reluctance to give you so much trouble."

Gabriel did not reply, and for a little way they walked on in silence.

Presently they came to a pile of black, broken rocks, shaded by a thick vaal-bush. Here Gabriel paused. "Now sit down and rest a little," he said, throwing off his jacket and spreading it over the rock. "No, it is not late," he added, as she glanced dubiously at the westering sun, "and I have not given you Lena's message yet."

But when she sat down, he seemed in no hurry to give the message. He stood silent so long, that Kathie looked up at length in surprise.

"Does the wording of that message require so much deliberation?" she asked. "It must be important."

"It ought not," he replied, bringing his eyes, and seemingly his thoughts too, back from a long distance. "Lena wishes you to come and spend a few days with her, and make the acquaintance of Aunt Maria."

"Your aunt has arrived then?"

"She came this morning, and intends to stay with us until after the wedding. I may tell Lena that you will come, may I not?"

"No, oh no, thank you, Mr. Bernhardt. I should like to go, but I could not possibly leave home now, even for a day."

"I was afraid you would not come. Lena will be disappointed; she is anxious, I believe, to get your adivce on the very important subject of her wedding finery."

"I am sorry; the matter is, as you say, very important, and I should like to give Lena the benefit of my advice, but I really cannot go.'

Once more Gabriel's thoughts went wandering. He stood leaning against the rock, watching the great asvogels as they flew round and round in ever-widening circles, their wings showing black against the fleecy clouds.

"Have you decided when the wedding is to be?" Kathie asked, breaking the long silence.

"It is to be six weeks from to-day."

"So soon? You will be lonely without Lena."

"Yes, I shall," he replied, and then, the speech he had been preparing so carefully, faithlessly deserting him in his need, he bent down and taking her hand, said, in a voice tremulous with feeling, "Don't let me be lonely, Kathie."

Kathie had never dreamed until that monment that Gabriel Bernhardt cared for her, and for a few minutes surprise and dismay kept her silent.

"Why do you not speak?" he asked, after waiting for the answer that did not come. "I have cared for you ever since the first time I saw you, I think, but I never had the right to tell you so till to-day. Speak, please, and tell me you are not angry with me for telling you now."

"I am not angry," she answered, rising suddenly and withdrawing her hand from his clasp. "But I am very sorry. I never dreamed that you—Please say no more about it."

"But I must say more, I cannot dismiss the matter so lightly as you would. It means so much to me, Kathie," he added suddenly, a flush rising to his dark face, as if she had suspected him of a crime. Kathie, you cannot think that I am asking you to share my Hebron hut? Surely you do not think me capable of that."

"You are asking me for what I cannot give you," she answered wearily, and almost impatiently. Why had Gabriel chosen this day of all others to tell her this.

"I know I am asking a great deal," he said, his grave face growing graver. "A great deal more than I deserve, but I have loved you so long, and without any hope that I could ever tell you so, for I would not have asked you to marry a penniless diamond-digger. But something happened this morning which will alter all my future life, and which has made it not wrong for me to tell you how much I care for you, and to ask you to try and care a little for me

in return. No, do not hurry home, sit down and rest awhile, and let me tell you what it is that has happened to me. I will not detain you long."

It was impossible to refuse, and though more unwilling than ever, Kathie sat down once more and prepared to listen.

"You have heard Lena and me speak of a small farm belonging to us in the Transvaal," he began. "It was left to us several years ago by an uncle of my mother's. It is a very barren, rocky place, and we never even deemed it worth a visit. But within the last year a very rich reef has been discovered running nearly through the whole length of it, and this morning I received a letter from the secretary of a company at Johannesburg offering me sixty thousand pounds for it."

Kathie did not speak, and he went on.

"This will make it possible for me to gratify what has been the wish of my life—to study for the ministry."

Kathie knew from Lena how intense and of what long standing was this wish, and she rejoiced sincerely that he was able at last to enter upon the career for which he was in every way so well fitted.

"I am very glad," she said heartily, "very glad indeed. You will make a noble minister, Mr. Bernhardt. You intend to go to Europe with Lena and Mr. Van Benan, I suppose, to study there."

"That is my intention, and—Kathie, you will come with me?"

"I cannot, I cannot, indeed, Gabriel; I am very sorry——"

"No, you must not be sorry," he interrupted. "To make you sorry—to grieve you in the slightest, faintest degree, is of all things what I wish least to do." And then taking her hand once more he pleaded his great love and his loneliness so earnestly that Kathie was almost tempted to answer him as he wished—tempted to accept this great, unselfish love which was offered her. Gabriel Bernhardt's wife would always have a strong arm and a strong mind to lean upon, and poor Kathie was so wearied, so worried, so troubled about many things, past, present, and future. Her father leant upon her, Pearl looked to her for advice and guidance, the boys depended upon her—she herself had no one, no one at least, but One—the only sure Guide and Support—for the moment she had forgotten Him, and she felt very lonely and forlorn, and sadly in need of a little

help and counsel. There was another feeling mingling with this one, a feeling which Kathie would not own to herself, but which was there nevertheless, urging her to yield, and saying in tones that would not be silenced, "If you do as Gabriel asks, Graham Keith will not be able to think that you still care for him." But it was only for a moment that these feelings—weariness and weakness on the one hand, and pride on the other—held the mastery. The next instant, better, nobler, holier feelings conquered, and she put the evil thoughts from her. Not for the world would she have so wronged him—good, unselfish Gabriel—as to give him only an empty heart in return for all his love.

"No, Mr. Bernhardt," she said resolutely once more. "Please say no more; it cannot be, indeed it cannot." And Gabriel was wise enough to know that more words would be wasted.

"I was afraid it could not be," he said. "It would have been too much happiness for me. Forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive; and now let us go on, please, and try and forget all this——"

"Yes, we will try," he said cheerfully, striving in his great unselfishness to hide from her his pain and disappointment lest it should grieve her; and not for worlds would he have added a feather's weight to her burden of care, which he knew was heavy enough already.

They walked the rest of the way in silence, and when they reached the tents Gabriel bade her good-bye, refusing to go in; Lena would be waiting tea for him, he said, and he had barely time to reach home before dark, and Kathie hurried into her tent and startled Pearl by bursting into a flood of bitter, half-hysterical tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WAITING FOR THE MULES.

One evening, a week later, Kathie was sitting at the table with a pile of the boys' clothes before her which she was busy mending. Pearl was standing at the door looking out into the starry brightness of the outer world. Mr. Milner sat at the head of the table with a pencil in his hand with which he was jotting down sundry figures in a small note-book.

"It could be done," he exclaimed at last, shutting up the book, and putting it in his pocket.

Kathie looked up at him inquiringly.

"I received a letter from Ambie this afternoon," he said, in answer to the look. "He has written to advise me to give up diamond-digging, and go to the Rand."

Pearl turned suddenly from her astronomical contemplations, and Kathie's heart gave a great bound of hope, for both knew by something in the tone of their father's voice that he was more than half inclined to take the said advice.

"Yes," continued Mr. Milner; "he strongly advises me to go. He believes, he says, that Johannesburg is destined in a very little while to become the largest and most important town in the country, and he is certain that a few hundreds wisely invested there now cannot fail to bring in a fortune in a very short time."

"But we have not even a few hundreds, papa."

"There is only one way to get them, Kathie. Mosswood is a nice place and in good repair, and if put in the market would fetch almost its value, I dare say. I have been making calculations, and I think it would bring enough to enable us to build a tolerably comfortable house at Johannesburg and have a few hundreds over. It is not a very bright prospect," he added, his face clouding, and his voice taking on its old dreary, hopeless tone. "But I am beginning to think that no change could be much for the worse; this last 'rush' has sickened me of diamond-digging."

"You are right, I am sure, papa," said Kathie earnestly. "I think any change would be for the better. Nothing—no place could be worse than this."

Mr. Milner sighed.

"It has been hard on you, my poor girl," he said, glancing as he spoke round the room, with its bare, dusty, iron walls, its floor of loose gravel, the pile of boxes in one corner, and then at her as she sat there in her worn, shabby dress, her roughened hand shading her thin, tired face. "I wish to Heaven that we had never come here, or that we had gone away as soon as we found that the place was not what Durwood represented it to be; but I always hoped to find 'something good,' as the diggers say, and—I was a fool, I suppose—I hoped we should find Gerald here or that he would find us. Kathie, I wonder if after all he came to this country."

"I think he did, papa."

"Do you think he is here yet?"

Kathie hesitated.

"It is impossible to tell, papa; he may be. But I do not think Gerald is——"

"Is what?"

"Of course one cannot tell, papa; but I do not think he can be living."

"Not living! Dead! Oh, no, Kathie, no, I cannot think that. Something would have told me if my boy had died. I have a feeling—call it nonsense, superstition, what you will—but I feel that Gerald and I will meet again in this world, and somehow I feel that it will not be long before we meet. I have dreamed of him so often of late."

That was not strange Kathie thought, since our dreams are often only the continuation of our waking thoughts, and Gerald was never out of her father's mind for long she knew, but she only said, "It may be, papa; who can tell? He may be nearer than we think."

"God grant it. But we will not talk of him now, or I shall be good for nothing, and I want to talk of our plans. I had half determined to leave this place before Ambie's letter came, and that has decided me. I think I shall write to Durwood at once and tell him to find a purchaser for Mosswood."

Once having decided to leave the diggings Mr. Milner evidently intended to lose no time in starting, but neither Kathie nor Pearl was inclined to murmur at this. They could not leave Hebron too soon.

"And," continued Mr. Milner, "I think you had better begin to pack up to-morrow, to move back to Hebron."

"To Hebron, papa!" exclaimed Kathie. "Would it not be better to stay here? One move will be better than two, will it not?"

"Perhaps; but every one is going away from this 'fool's rush.' They are taking the shop away to-morrow, and we could not possibly send four miles every time we wanted to buy a trifle."

"No, of course not; and if you have to send and receive many letters it will be more convenient to be near the post-office."

"Much more; it will be better to go back for every reason. I shall write to Ambie to-morrow and let him know what I have decided to do. He will be glad to know that we have done with Hebron. We shall not be able to get Chips' waggon to take us back to Natal Kopje. I wonder if Smith

will let us have his mule-wagon. When do you think you can be ready?"

"I think we could be ready by the day after to-morrow, eh, Pearl? We have not much to pack."

"No. Well, I'll leave my letter to Durwood till to-morrow and go and see Smith at once." And taking up his hat hastily, as if the prospect of soon leaving dull, dreary Hebron had inspired him with new energy, he left the tent.

Kathie went on with her sewing, feeling as if part of a great weight had been lifted off her heart. Leave Hebron! That was of all things what she longed most to do; she longed to leave it for her father's sake, for the boys', for her own, and Pearl's, and since Graham Keith's arrival at the diggings there was another reason why she wished to go away. Since his coming Hebron had grown more than ever hateful to her, and she longed to go to some place where she would never meet him again. He was not likely to remain long in Hebron she knew, but having come there once he might come again, and for Graham Keith, who at the first breath of sorrow and shame had shrunk from her, to see her in the depth of poverty, her father toiling in a diamond claim by the side of a gang of dirty, noisy natives, was gall and wormwood to her. She told herself that it did not matter what Graham Keith saw or thought, he was nothing to her, she disliked and despised him, but in vain, and poor Kathie was shocked and astonished to find that her pride was so strong and unsubdued after all the chastening it had received. There was another feeling too in the depths of her heart; stronger than pride, and even more unconquerable, which lifted its head again and again after she thought that she had left it dead on the field; a feeling which made her shrink from meeting him and which filled her with the intensest scorn of her own weakness. More than a week had passed since little Johnny Roberts' funeral, and in that time she had met him twice; once when visiting the poor heart-broken mother, once when calling at the little shop for letters; and Kathie felt that she could not bear to meet him in that way again.

"Kathie Milner, what are you made of?" exclaimed Pearl, suddenly breaking in upon her reverie, seizing at the same time the garment upon which she was busy and tossing it to the other end of the room. "What *can* you be made of to sit there calmly sewing after what you have heard? We are going to leave Hebron; that means to

leave diamond-digging, dirt, dust, rags, and starvation behind us. Do you realise it? Oh, Kathie!" and in the exuberance of her delight Pearl seized Kathie round the waist and waltzed with her out of the room and all around the nearest vaal-bush, finally sinking down, panting, upon a huge ant-heap.

"Really, Pearl," exclaimed Kathie when she had recovered her breath. "You and I are far too old to behave in such an undignified manner. Why the mear-kats are actually coming out of their holes to look at us."

"Let them come, I don't care who looks at us. Kathie, for goodness' sake say you are glad, or something. Going to leave Hebron! Think of it! Perhaps in two or three months we shall be looking at the stars above Johannesburg."

The next day was spent in packing, and on the next, Mr. Smith having promised to bring his wagon at seven o'clock, they rose before dawn, finished their packing, snatched a hasty breakfast, and then pulled down the tents.

It was long past seven when they had finished, but there was no sign of Mr. Smith or his wagon. There was nothing to do, however, but sit down and wait until he chose to put in an appearance. This was anything but pleasant, as the sun was burning hot, and the stunted bushes afforded little shade. Two hours were passed in this fashion, and then Sydney was dispatched to Smith's tent to inquire the cause of the delay.

He returned in a little while with the cheering intelligence that the mules were lost, and that though the Kafir boys had been searching for them all the morning they had failed to find them.

"Why does he not go and look for them himself?" demanded Mr. Milner.

"He has gone; he was starting after them when I got there."

"I think I will go and look for them too," said Mr. Milner rising. "We can't wait here all day; we shall have a storm this afternoon most likely;" and cutting a thick vaal-bush stick, he set off.

Hour after hour passed drearily away. Kathie and Pearl sat on their boxes, holding their sunshades over their heads. It was too hot to talk, and it was impossible to read in the

unshadowed glare of the sunlight. The wind was strong and almost as hot as the breath of a furnace; the grass and dust-laden bushes looked red in the fierce light, and a quivering smoke-like haze enveloped the kopjes.

"I wish we had not taken down the tents," said Pearl for the hundredth time. "We shall be burned up or get a sunstroke or something. I have a great mind to go and look for those mules myself."

"Pray do not; you would only get lost, and we should have to stop and wait until you were found; I dare say they will come presently. I wish papa had not gone to look for them in this heat; it is enough to make him ill."

"He'd have been just as badly off if he had stayed here. I fancy he will find it cooler on the kopjes than sitting here in the sun."

"I hope so. How late it is getting; these poor boys must want some dinner. Syd, dear, suppose you collect some wood and make a fire."

"A fire!" exclaimed Syd. "Isn't it hot enough for you yet?"

"Quite; so hot that a fire can't make a bit of difference, and I think a cup of tea might make us all feel a little better."

"So it would. Let's have it. But I say, Kathie, you can't make tea without water, can you?"

"There is water, is there not?"

"Not a drop; papa told us to empty the cask, and we did."

So there was nothing for it but to resume their seats and their dreary occupation of patient waiting, and now that they knew that the tea could not be had, every one began to feel intolerably thirsty.

"I wonder how much longer we shall have to wait," said Pearl when another long, hot hour had passed, and still the missing mules did not come. "I shall tell that man what I think of him when he does come."

"I think I shall go over and see Mrs. Roberts," said Kathie; "she was out when I went yesterday, and I don't like to leave without saying good-bye to her. Will you come?"

"No, I don't think so; you can say good-bye for me, too."

"Very well, I shall not be long; and if Mr. Smith comes before I return he can come and call me."

Mrs. Roberts was sitting all alone in her tent folding up some little shabby garments which Kathie recognised as having belonged to her dead son. Her thin hands trembled, and her tears fell plentifully upon the little, oft-mended garments, but her face lighted up with pleasure when Kathie entered.

"Oh! This is kind of you, Miss Milner," she exclaimed. "I tried to walk over to your place this morning; but it was so hot that I turned giddy and had to come back."

"Are you not well?" asked Kathie.

"Oh, yes, I am well, that is, I'm not sick; but I went all the way into town yesterday, and missed the wagon that I meant to come back with, so I had to walk all the way home. I didn't get here till after nine o'clock. I've been knocked up ever since."

"I should think so, indeed!" exclaimed Kathie shocked. "Why, it was raining at nine o'clock last night."

"Yes, I got pretty wet. I wouldn't have gone, but I heard that poor Mrs. Bricer was sick, and though it's not much I can do, I can't keep away if I hear anyone's sick. She's got a little boy just about the age of my Johnny," and again the tears welled up into her eyes and overflowed. "It's for him I'm mending up these clothes of my poor boy's. Oh, Miss Milner, I thought I had mean, shabby clothes for my boy, but you should see that poor child, he's in rags. I don't somehow like to give away all I have left to remind me of Johnny, but I can't keep them when that child is going almost naked, and I know it's what Johnny'd like me to do if he could know of it; don't you think so?"

"I do indeed," replied Kathie, profoundly touched by the woman's gentle unselfishness. "I am sure he would, Mrs. Roberts; he was such a generous little fellow, and always seemed to think of others before himself."

"Yes, wasn't he? And he'd know that I needn't to keep anything to remind me of him, for I'll never forget him; his face is never out of my mind for a minute. Oh, Miss Milner, I am so glad we buried him here in the green grass, under the vaal bushes. I couldn't bear the thought of going away and leaving him lying in that forlorn Hebron graveyard. I've often seen the goats and donkeys feeding round the graves, and though I know it makes no difference to them that lie below, I couldn't bear to think of his being there, when I'm gone."

"Are you going soon?" asked Kathie.

"Yes; we shall go as soon as we get word from the doctor. He went back to Kimberley yesterday."

"I hope you will get on there and be comfortable," said Kathie earnestly, her pity stirred by the quiet hopelessness of the woman's face and voice. "You will write to me sometimes, will you not?"

"Indeed I will, Miss Milner, if you care to hear from me."

"I shall care very much; we shall be here for a month or two yet, I expect, and then we are going to Johannesburg."

"To Johannesburg, are you? Well, you won't mind my saying that I'm very glad you're going away from these wretched diamond diggings. I know you've had your troubles here, Miss Milner. I've often felt for you, for I've known what it is to be young and inexperienced and motherless. I'm very glad you're going away."

"We shall be very glad to go. I shall often think of the poor people who are struggling on here, looking and toiling for what they can't find."

"So shall I when I go away. I don't think there's any place in the whole of South Africa where there's so much poverty as there is here. People come here—not only here but to the other diggings along the river, though this is the worst, I believe—and work and toil and make nothing, and by the time they've found out that there's nothing to be gained by staying, they've used up what little money they brought with them, and can't get away. You have no idea what straits some of the poor diggers are put to."

Kathie thought that she had perhaps a clearer idea on the subject than Mrs. Roberts imagined, and recollections of patched and mended shoes, dinners of dry bread and black tea, and a hundred unsupplied needs and wants, flashed through her mind. But Mrs. Roberts was right; their poverty was riches compared with that of some of the other diggers.

"But," continued she, "in spite of all I know, and of all I have suffered here myself, I was shocked and astonished at what I saw yesterday. I knew such things, and worse, were common enough in Europe and America, but I never thought to see such in this country, and you wouldn't see them either anywhere but here on the diggings, not if you went to every town from Cape Town to Maritzburg, I'm certain. There's that poor woman, Mrs. Bricer, she's sick and her baby's

sick; it's two years old nearly, and I don't believe it's had a proper meal once in its life. A poor, puny, little thing, it would give you the heartache to see it. And then there are two girls—nice children they are too—and the boy I spoke of, just my Johnny's age. Well, Miss Milner, to say that I found them starving and in rags wouldn't give you a true idea of the pitiable state they were in. Thanks to Dr. Keith's kindness, which somehow doesn't seem like cold, condescending charity, as it would from any one else, I was able to send them a few little things this morning. They haven't found any diamonds for more than six months, and as they have nothing else to depend on you can guess what that means, Miss Milner. Mr. Bricer has no boys to work for him, and they have to do it all themselves—digging, washing, and everything, even to carrying the water to the claim. How they stand it, starved as they've been for months past, heaven only knows."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Kathie; "I wish I could do something for them."

"It wouldn't be any use, Miss Milner, you couldn't support the whole family nor all the other families who are in much the same plight. If you could help them to leave the place it might be some good. They could do better anywhere else, but they can't go without money, and that they won't get here, not if they stay a hundred years. When will people believe, I wonder, that the supply of river diamonds is exhausted, or if it is not exhausted it is quite certain that the diggings can only be profitably worked by companies?"

"It is strange," said Kathie, "how few people seem to know the truth. Outsiders know nothing at all of the real state of things here; they fancy that the diggers lead a healthy, open-air, gipsy life, with a spice of romance and adventure about it; and that if they work hard enough they will find plenty of diamonds, or as they say, 'they will make a living.'"

"Yes," said Mrs. Roberts bitterly, "they can make a living. Such a living as we have made for the last two years, such a living as the Bricers make, such a living as that young Wood makes. It is little wonder that men take to drink here, whilst women become sickly, worn-out and degraded when they are placed in such circumstances without any hope of getting out of them. Yes, it may seem romantic to live by a river-side in a ragged tent, and eat dry bread and mealie meal porridge month in and month out, and go about

in rags, and see your children sick and starving, but I can tell them it's a kind of romance that soon wears off."

"It does, indeed," replied Kathie. "And though we have never yet been reduced to quite such straits as you have been describing, we shall be glad and thankful to leave the diggings. And, Mrs. Roberts, I think it is probable that we shall go to Kimberley for a few days before we start for Johannesburg; in what part of the big, busy city shall we find you?"

"Somewhere near the Kimberley Central Mine, I expect; it is there that Dr. Keith has promised to find work for my husband. But when I write I'll send you our address. I should like to see you before you go away altogether. When are you going to leave here?"

"We are not quite sure yet; but I fancy it will be two months or more before we are ready. Such a long journey will require long preparation."

"Yes, it will take you quite as long as that to get ready, I should think; but I meant, when are you going to leave the 'rush'?"

"We intended to go this morning; we were up hours before it was light packing up. Mr. Smith promised to bring his wagon at seven o'clock, but he has lost his mules, and he had not found them when I came away, so I do not know when we shall be able to go."

"Really, that's too bad. I hope your tents are not down."

"Yes, we took them down early this morning."

"Oh, dear, dear! And have you been sitting outside in the heat ever since? Why it's enough to give you all a sunstroke. No wonder you looked ready to faint when you came in. I suppose you had breakfast early."

"Oh, yes, before six o'clock."

"And nothing since?"

Kathie smiled.

"No; when we began to think we required something to sustain us through the fiery ordeal, we discovered that all the water had been thrown out."

"And you haven't even had a cup of tea!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts in a tone of concern. "Well, you shall have one in ten minutes. I wish I'd known before," and she seized her little battered teapot and was hurrying out when Kathie stopped her.

"No, no, Mrs. Roberts," she exclaimed. "Indeed you

must not trouble to make tea for me. I do not need it, and I cannot let you go out in this heat for me."

"Indeed I will though. My fire is burning, and it won't take a minute. Don't talk of trouble, Miss Milner, for it's none, and if it was, haven't you often taken trouble for me, much more than I can ever repay?" and without waiting for Kathie to reply, she hurried out, and began to blow the smoking vaal-bush roots into a blaze. Presently she returned with the tea, and poured out a cup for Kathie, saying, as she handed it to her:

"I am sorry I have no milk to put in it and nothing but black sugar to sweeten it with, but perhaps it will refresh you."

"Thank you; I am sure it will, only I wish you had not gone to so much trouble for me."

"Now, don't say that, Miss Milner. I wish I could do something for you worth doing. I'm just going to fill this little can with tea for you to take back with you when you go, if you don't mind carrying it. Perhaps your father will appreciate a cup, and your sister and the little boys. When it's empty you can just hang it on a bush and I'll get it to-morrow, you needn't trouble to send it back."

Kathie thanked her and soon after declared that she must go, and she bade Mrs. Roberts good-bye, repeating her promise to visit her in Kimberley. The sun seemed hotter than ever, and Kathie walked homeward slowly, thinking as she went of what Mrs. Roberts had told her. What poverty, what misery there were on the diggings! What lives of wretchedness and hopelessness some people were leading! Kathie felt ashamed of all her repinings when she thought that, after all, her life had been bright and pleasant compared with that of many others, and her head and heart were bowed in deep gratitude to God for the hope she had of soon leaving Hebron behind for ever.

Before she had accomplished half the distance that lay between Mrs. Roberts' tent and the place where their household goods were lying scattered about, she was startled by a loud peal of thunder, and looking up she saw what she had been too deep in thought to notice before, that the sky was growing black with great clouds. One of the sudden, violent storms so common in those regions was about to burst over them. She hastened her steps to a run, and reached home just as the first, loud, scattering drops began to fall.

"Has papa come back?" she asked breathlessly.

"No, not yet," replied Pearl. "Oh, Kathie! we are going to have a terrible storm; everything will be spoiled. What are we going to do?"

"Drink a cup of tea, the first thing, and then we will try and draw the big sail over the things that will suffer most from a wetting."

This was done. The rolls of blankets and bedding, the basket of bread, and several of the lightest of the trunks, were hastily carried under a clump of bushes, and with great difficulty they succeeded in dragging the huge, greasy wagon sail over them. They had barely finished their task when the rain began to pour down in torrents.

"We're in for it this time," shouted Sydney, leaping on to the table and executing an Indian war dance, his cheeks scarlet with heat and exertion, and the water streaming from his bright curls. "If I live to leave Hebron I'll write a book, entitled 'Life and Adventures of a Respectable English Family on The Diamond Diggings;' see if I don't."

"Who do you suppose would read it?" asked Pearl. "When *I* leave Hebron I shall do my best to forget that I've ever been there."

"I hope," said Kathie, but speaking more to herself than to the others, "I hope that we shall never forget all the lessons we have learned here."

"Now, Kathie, don't preach," cried Pearl imploringly. "A sermon and a thunderstorm at the same time are more than my nerves can stand—cast-iron though they may be."

"No, don't let's have any preaching," said Syd. "Suppose we sing instead. Lead off, Pearl."

"Sing," repeated Pearl. "How can I sing with the water pouring into my mouth every time I open it?"

"Can't you turn your back to the shower?"

And so, for awhile, they laughed and jested over the discomfort; but when the thunder claps became louder and more appalling, and the terrible lightning seemed to hiss around them, and the rain fell in heavier torrents, drenching them to the skin, it became impossible to maintain even the semblance of cheerfulness. Syd got off his perch on the table and crouched under it instead, and the others huddled together in a shivering group.

"This is terrible," cried Kathie, when half an hour had passed without the storm abating in the slightest degree.

"Clive will certainly be ill. Pearl, don't you think we could lift the sail, and try and get under it?"

"We can try," Pearl replied doubtfully. "But I am afraid we'll be smothered, and the ground underneath it must be as wet as it is here."

After much tugging and pulling, they contrived to raise the great sail heavy with water. The boys crawled under it and Pearl and Kathie followed. For the first few minutes it was a relief to be sheltered from the pelting rain and chilly wind, but it soon grew unbearably hot, and the wet steaming earth was swarming with ants, "thousand-legs," and a hundred other unpleasant creeping things, and they were very soon glad to get out into the open air once more.

Another half-hour passed, and the storm began slowly to abate, the thunder peals grew less frequent, and the lightning flashes less awfully vivid; but the rain still fell heavily, and the rising wind dashed the great wet boughs of the vaal bushes in their faces and chilled them through and through as they sat in their dripping, mud-splashed garments.

"What a picture we should make!" exclaimed Sydney, whose high spirits no amount of rain could wash away. "I wish some wandering artist would come here now. I would give anything for Pearl's portrait; she has a great splash of mud on one cheek, and her hair is stuck full of dead vaal-bush twigs. And her expression! It is beyond anything. It beggars description, as the newspapers say." And the irrepressible Syd went off into a long peal of laughter.

"Thank Heaven that we are not going to stay in this place much longer," ejaculated Pearl fervently. "You are right, Syd, to get as much amusement out of the storm as you can, for it may be the last experience of the kind that you will have."

"Well, I don't care if it is," replied Sydney. "I mean to get as much fun out of it as I can, but I shan't be able to see the funny side much longer if I get any colder or hungrier than I am now. Halloa! here are those old mules at last, I do believe;" and springing down from the pile of boxes on which he had been standing, he dashed away through the dripping trees and grass to meet the slowly advancing wagon.

It proved to be that of Mr. Smith, who threw down his whip when he caught sight of the little group and hurried to them with upraised hands, exclaiming in tones of genuine commiseration:

"Well, this is too bad; too bad altogether. How long have you been waiting for me?"

"We have been waiting all day," Kathie answered quietly.

"Well, Miss Milner, I'm more sorry than I can tell you. Believe me it's not been my fault; I told the boys to keep the mules in last night and inspan them the first thing this morning, and they just let them get away. When I got up they were gone, and I've been hunting for them nearly ever since. Believe me there's no depending on niggers. Where's your father?"

"He went away several hours ago to look for the mules."

"You don't say so! Well, I hope he took shelter somewhere in the storm. And you're all dripping wet, I suppose?"

"We could not well be much wetter," Kathie replied.

"Well, I hope you don't blame me, I wouldn't have had it happen for anything. And now what's best to be done? Shall we set to work at once and load up and make the best of our way into Hebron, or shall we put up a couple of the tents again? We can do it in no time if you'd rather stay here to-night."

"No; I think we had better go, since you have brought the wagon, and there are still three hours of daylight left."

"Yes, I believe it'll be best to get away. The worst of the storm's over, I think, and I dare say by the time we've got the wagon loaded Mr. Milner'll be back."

Accordingly Mr. Smith and the Kafirs he had brought with him began hastily to toss up the wet boxes, bags, and bundles, the former, all the time grumbling, apologizing, and commiserating Kathie and Pearl upon their wretched plight.

At last the wagon was loaded; more quickly than he had ever loaded a wagon before Mr. Smith declared, and the girls, with saturated, muddy shoes, draggled skirts, and the water dripping from their hair, were just climbing into it when Mr. Milner came up. His hat was gone, his clothes clung to him, and he was splashed with mud from head to foot. The tears rushed to Kathie's eyes at the sight of her father in such a forlorn condition, and she breathed for the twentieth time a prayer of thankfulness that soon Hebron with all its trials and discomforts would be left behind for ever.

"I understood you to say," began Mr. Milner angrily, as Smith hurried up to him, "I understood you to say, that

you would be here at seven o'clock. I did not know you meant seven in the evening."

"No more I did mean seven in the evening," answered Smith surlily (he was sincerely sorry for the delay and for the inconvenience it had caused them, but he had no mind to be taken to account for it.) "I came as soon as I could. I've been hunting for my mules the whole blessed day, and as soon as I found them I came. I couldn't do any more than that."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Milner wearily. "Well, if everything is loaded up, we had better start at once."

So in the rain and mud and gathering darkness they rumbled off, finding perhaps a gleam of comfort in the fact which Mr. Smith came round to the back of the wagon to tell them, "that they had sandy roads to travel, and not clayey ones."

The rain had ceased, but it was very dark when they jolted over the well-known white road, and stopped on the top of Natal Kopje once more.

The tents were pitched over the muddy earth by the faint light of the lanterns which Kathie and Pearl held, the wagon was quickly off-loaded, and then, wet, tired, and supperless, they went to bed on damp, steamy beds, having added one more to their many rough experiences of Life on the River Diggings.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LENA'S WEDDING—THE TELEGRAM.

LENA BERNHARDT'S wedding day dawned fair and bright, as fair and bright as the future all hoped would be hers. For herself, Lena looked for no life of unshadowed brightness; she knew that in the life of the happiest mortals, clouds alternate with sunshine and storm with calm. There are few plants which can thrive in an atmosphere of constant brightness; they must have cloud and wind and rain to bring them to perfection, otherwise they become rough, stunted, and unlovely. The Heavenly Gardener knows this, and places His human plants in just the situations where they will thrive the best. Lena had known more of clouds than of brightness in the past, and she expected them in the future, but she did not fear them. She believed that

"every cloud has Jesus for its pilot," and believing that she could not but be happy. No cloud could shadow her life which was not needful, no pain or loss could come to her which He did not send in His great love and care for her soul's good, and to fit her for that kingdom towards which her feet had long been directed. Her future husband, too, was one who had long since dedicated himself to God, and who had given his all to the service of Him who had redeemed man with His blood. A man at whose side she could walk bravely heavenward, and on whose truth and judgment she could always rely. She had therefore very strong and sure foundations on which to build her hopes of happiness. She would be the wife of one whose feet were planted firmly on the rock of ages, even as were her own, and, whatever storms of earthly sorrow or loss should rage around them, they could never be swept from that sure and safe refuge. They would have each other's love and sympathy in this world, and the sure and certain hope of meeting in the world beyond.

Kathie and Pearl went early, at Lena's earnest request, before the other guests arrived. Mr. Milner was not able to go, as he had been obliged to ride to Barkly that morning in order to send a telegram to his agent at Cape Town, and would not return until evening.

The ceremony was to be performed by a clergyman who was a very dear friend of Mr. Van Renen, and an old acquaintance of the Bernhardts', and who had come all the way from Cape Town for the purpose.

By-and-by the few invited guests began to arrive. All Lena's relatives and also those of Mr. Van Renen lived in the Western Province, so that the gathering was not a large one. First came Mrs. Hout and her son, the former dressed in the severe, old-fashioned style she always affected, her face lit up by affection, and her beautiful dark eyes full of kindly interest; the latter silent and observant as usual, looking somewhat awkward and uncomfortable in the new black suit and stiff white collar he had donned for the occasion. Next came Towser Chips, and then Mrs. Bain in a blaze of splendour and accompanied by her nephew, well-dressed, beaming, and complacent as usual, and Miss Long, who always acted the part of satellite to these two luminaries—only eight guests, including Kathie and Pearl, but the little room was full, and Gabriel and his aunt had some little difficulty in providing them all with seats.

Pearl had filled the room with flowers, plucking ruthlessly all the treasures of the little garden which Lena had tended so long and so lovingly. She would not leave a single blossom, she said, to be trampled on by the profane feet of the little Griqua and Korana children, who would henceforth be suffered unchecked to run wild over the flower-beds and through the empty rooms of the reed house, consequently in every place where she could wreath or group them flowers showed their dainty faces and breathed out their perfume. On the little table before which the bride and bridegroom were to stand she had built a hollow cone of white "topers" and crystals, and concealed a slender vase inside, in which she had placed white rose-buds and fragrant sprigs of "traveller's joy."

The windows were wide open; the sunshine came flickering tenderly in; and the ripple of the shining river and the wild birds mingled their song with the strains of the stirring wedding march which Pearl struck up when Lena came in on her brother's arm. Very beautiful she looked in her soft white dress and filmy veil, her bright, handsome face a trifle paler and graver than usual. The wedding march ceased after awhile, but the little brown birds sang brilliantly all the time the irrevocable words were being spoken. At last it was over, the ceremony was concluded; Lena and Mr. Van Renen had taken each other for better for worse till death parted them, and the little group of friends gathered around the newly wedded pair with hand-shakes and good-wishes. Then the wedding march pealed joyously forth once more, and Gabriel and Hans Hout handed cake and wine—there was no room in that little house for a wedding breakfast—and the only speech of the morning was made by Mr. Parkins, who, though neither the oldest gentleman, nor the oldest friend present, seemed to fancy that the duty, or privilege, whichever he deemed it, devolved upon him. In a long, flowery speech, in which the bride's "beauty, grace," and the "humble home" she was leaving, were mentioned over and over again, with charming good taste, he offered his congratulations and those of all present. Mr. Van Renen, throwing a comical glance at his bride, then in a few words, spoken in rather an amused tone, replied to the lengthy and elaborate speech.

Soon after, Mrs. Bain, her nephew, and Miss Long took their leave; Mrs. Bain remarking, as soon as they were outside the gate, that it had been a "miserable, dull sort of

wedding." It had given her the blues, and she wondered that, with all the money Lena and Gabriel had come into, it hadn't been a more stylish affair. Her dutiful nephew agreed that it had been rather slow. "The idea of their inviting such people as old mother Hout and her son, and a fellow like Towser Chips," and he hoped that when Miss Long asked him to her wedding she would invite a livelier set of people to meet him. Whereupon Miss Long said "for shame," and begged Mr. Parkins, quite earnestly, "not to tease her so."

Meanwhile, Lena and the friends who had not found the "affair" "too slow," nor the company too unpolished for them, were talking together in blissful ignorance of adverse criticism, making the most of the last hour they would spend together for some time.

"How dreary the poor little house will look when you are gone," said Pearl, when she and Kathie had withdrawn with Lena to her room, whither she had gone to change her white robes for a travelling dress.

"Yes, will it not?" said Lena, glancing affectionately around the room, which, with the removal of the little knick-knacks which Lena intended to take with her, already looked bare and dismantled. "I shall not like to think of the dear little rooms where we have lived so long being left to emptiness and decay."

"I shall be careful to turn my eyes in the other direction whenever I pass it," said Pearl, "or I shall be fancying that I see your face at the window and hear the piano tinkling inside."

Lena smiled. "You will not fancy the latter," she said, "for you will hear it tinkling in your own tent often I hope. Mr. Chips has promised to take it up to you to-morrow."

"To me!" exclaimed Pearl, the bright colour rushing to her cheeks. "You are not going to give me your piano, Lena?"

"Yes, I am. I always meant to leave it to you if I left Hebron first, as a little memento of the many pleasant hours you and I have spent together over it."

"Oh, Lena, this is too good of you. But you must not give it away, the dear little piano you have had so long, and liked so much, you would never like a new one so well."

"Would I not? Yes I would. No, I am not going to let

you refuse it, Pearl; you must take it. Do not think that you will be depriving me of it, for I could not take it with me anyway. I could not carry so large a thing as a piano about with me on my travels, and I could not bear to leave my dear old friend with any one who would value it less than I do myself."

"Oh, Lena, how can I thank you? I shall value it above all my possessions, and love it for your sake more than for its own."

"I know you will, dear. How pleasant it is," she added, "to have friends who one knows will miss one and think of one when one is far away. I have been more fortunate in that respect than most people, I think; I seem to have so many good, true friends."

Lena was far from guessing that the reason of that lay in herself, though both Kathie and Pearl could have told her.

"And this is a little keepsake that I want you to wear to remind you of me, Kathie," she said, lifting a little velvet-lined case from the table and taking from it a beautiful bracelet made of small, oval-shaped agates of a soft moss-green colour, and fastened together with tiny links of gold.

"Oh, Lena! How exquisite! But it seems to me that you are reversing the order of things, and giving instead of receiving wedding presents."

"That is just as it should be," replied Lena. "I have always thought that it was the bride and bridegroom who should give presents to their friends and not the friends to them. But we must go out or those people in the next room will be thinking that we have shut ourselves up here for the remainder of the day. Oh, Kathie, how nice it is to know that we are not going to say good-bye for an indefinite time, but that by this time next year, if God will, we shall all meet at Johannesburg."

Just then Gabriel came to the door to tell Lena that the carriage which was to take them to Kimberley was waiting, and that she must hurry if she wished to be in time to catch the evening train.

He was to leave Hebron with his sister and her husband, while his aunt was to remain in the little house, with Mrs. Hout to keep her company, long enough to pack the furniture which they had decided to give to Mrs. Roberts' *protegés*, the Bricers. His sister's wedding day, even though she

had become the wife of his oldest friend, could not be an altogether happy one to Gabriel. They had been more to each other than sisters and brothers usually are. Of the same age and the same tastes, they had played, studied, done, and suffered so much together, and for the past seven years they had been all in all to each other. Thus giving up his sister was very like giving up a part of himself. How deeply he would miss her not even Lena herself guessed. Gabriel had dreamed and hoped, but hardly dared to expect that the day would come when he should be able to leave Hebron with sufficient means to enable him to enter a university to complete the studies which had been broken off so suddenly years before; and now the day had come in company with a disappointment which almost or wholly robs it of its joy. Seven years ago Gabriel had dedicated his life and his talents to God, and had dreamed of and longed for the time when he might study for the ministry and become a preacher of His gospel. God, in His own time and in His own way, when Gabriel had almost ceased to hope that the time would ever come, had given him what he wished, and he was glad and thankful, taking the gift joyfully and reverently from His hand. He rejoiced to think that the seven years of waiting, which had been so weary and so full of care of many kinds, had been just the preparation he needed for the work of the ministry which would henceforth be his. But for the last two years he had felt that his life would be incomplete without Kathie's love and sympathy. Now he knew that they could never be his; and his disappointment, though it did not altogether counterbalance his joy and gratitude, was very deep, all the deeper because he buried in his own heart, and spoke of it not even to Lena. Even this sorrow, however, could not, with the inner light which would always illumine his path, make him unhappy. He would go forth to his work "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," to do His work, to sow beside all waters, and to bear his testimony to the truth and unfailing love of the God whom it was the business of his life to serve; and in so doing he could not be aught but truly and sincerely happy.

The carriage and Mr. Van Renen were waiting, the latter a little impatiently, when Lena joined her friends in the parlour, and the farewells were hurriedly spoken, for no one wished to lose the train from Kimberley, and consequently the steamer at the Kowie also. They were not sad fare-

wells, however, for they were brightened by the hope of a happy meeting a year hence in Johannesburg.

They drove off, and those left behind gathered on the doorstep with smiles and tears, waving hands and handkerchiefs, until the carriage turned a bend in the road and was lost to sight.

* * * * * *

The weeks that followed Lena's wedding-day passed with the Milners much as usual. The only difference was that Mr. Milner did not go to his claim every day, but spent his time instead in writing to and answering letters from Mr. Durwood, and in discussing plans and projects with Kathie, and that the trials and discomforts, inseparable from the rough, open-air life they led were borne cheerfully and uncomplainingly, and even made merry over, so easy it is to bear present troubles if the future but seems to yield us a gleam of brightness. "When we leave Hebron," "When we are in Johannesburg," were the sentences oftenest on the lips of all; and things which would at any other time have annoyed, even exasperated them, were unnoticed or laughed at now.

Mr. Milner had sold the diamond ring, and the money had been carefully and with the utmost economy laid out by Kathie and Pearl in the cheapest store in Hebron, and the little sewing machine went whirring on all through the sunny mornings and stormy afternoons of the autumn weeks. Kathie and Pearl worked on unwearyingly, taking occasionally for their only recreation an early morning's walk or a moonlight one, as the case might be, to the river, where they would rest on the bank talking over the future, about which Pearl, at least, was inclined to be so hopeful, and never returning without gathering a few flowers from Lena's garden which began to look neglected and abandoned already.

The boys' studies were suspended, and they spent their time very happily and very characteristically, the elder in singing perched up in a vaal-bush, playing on Lena's piano, or riding on the donkeys and goats that browsed about the kopjes, the younger in sinking shafts, building bridges, or else lying prone on the ground for hours at a time watching the busy black ants staggering along under their loads of wood and straw six times their own size. Of all the time the Milners had spent in Hebron, these weeks were by far the pleasantest. Alas! that the hope which made them so was doomed to die a sudden death.

One evening, Kathie and Pearl, having finished their last piece of sewing work and put it away with a sigh of relief, Pearl went to her beloved piano, and began to sing, while Kathie took her hat, and going to the coolest, shadiest spot she could find, sat down to enjoy a well-earned rest. It was one of those perfect evenings which sometimes, though rarely, visit dusty, wind-blown Hebron. The air was like balm, the rocky hills were etheraelised, and almost hidden by the veil of pearly haze that covered them. A few light, fleecy clouds rested on the horizon; the rest of the sky was of softest, clearest blue.

Kathie's eyes rested on the misty line of hills which were so familiar, with the affection which we always come to feel for the natural objects around, even a home where we have not been happy. Her thoughts went back to the afternoon when she had sat just where she was sitting now and looked out at the purple hills and the white road then so new and unfamiliar, and had seen Lena Bernhardt coming over the kopje towards her. How much had come and gone since then, how much of trial and perplexity had been crowded into the two years and a half which had passed since that day; how dear Lena, a stranger then, had become. From the kopjes Kathie's eyes went to Towser Chips' little camp, which was in an unusual state of bustle and excitement this afternoon, for its master was just about to start for Klerksdoorp, having at last made up his mind to do what he had so often threatened—"Cut his walkin' stick and clear from the diggins." His wagon was loaded, and on the top was Adonis the baboon grimacing horribly, and dancing to his own music as he beat with a spoon on the bottom of a tin dish. Towser was helping his Kafirs to inspan, and the crane, with outspread wings and little complaining cries, was following him from place to place.

"Another good-bye," thought Kathie. "How many there are to say, and how unwillingly we should say good-bye to good, kind-hearted Towser Chips, and how bitterly hard it would have been to say good-bye to Lena, if we did not expect to meet them again very soon. We shall be sure to see Chips again when we go through Klerksdoorp. I hope he will get on; he deserves to, I'm sure. What a curious mixture he is of roughness and gentleness, of culture and ignorance, of shrewd Yankee sharpness and soft-hearted generosity, of wordly wisdom and Christian charity; and

what a safer, better, happier place this world would be if everyone were more like him."

At that moment the sound of horse's hoofs caused her to look up, and she saw Mr. Parkins riding quickly along the path which led from the town. He was not a very frequent visitor, and Kathie wondered a little what was bringing him now, little dreaming, however, what a blow was about to be dealt her. He dismounted, and after his customary elaborate greetings and enquiries were over, he handed her a telegram.

"It came by post this afternoon, Miss Milner," he said. "It is addressed to Barkly, and has been sent on here, and I rode up as soon—immediately—thinking that it might be important."

Kathie took the ugly yellow envelope from him, feeling surprised and a trifle uneasy. She knew that her father was not expecting a telegram. He had received a good many during the past week or two from Mr. Durwood; but now that Mosswood was sold there was no occasion for any more messages backwards and forwards, and Mr. Milner was expecting nothing now but the purchaser's cheque for the amount for which it had been sold.

"There is nothing wrong, I hope?" said Mr. Parkins watching her curiously from under his long light lashes.

"I hope not," she replied. "My father will be much obliged to you for taking the trouble to bring it up." But she made no attempt to open it, and he was forced to ride away again with his curiosity ungratified.

Mr. Milner was not in just then, and feeling an unaccountable reluctance to open the telegram herself, Kathie waited until he came in at tea time.

"Another telegram!" he exclaimed. "Who is it from?"

"I do not know, papa. I did not open it. It is directed to Barkly, and has been sent on here."

"Not open it! What an astonishing want of feminine curiosity," he said with a smile. But the smile faded quickly as he read the words, and he turned so pale that Kathie thought he was about to faint.

"What is it, papa?" she asked, sinking on to her knees beside his chair almost as pale as he. "What has happened?"

He did not answer, and she picked up the crumpled paper which had fallen to the floor and read it.

"What is it?" cried Pearl, terrified at the effect the

innocent looking paper had produced. "For Heaven's sake, who is it from, and what is it about?"

"It is from Mr. Hildyard; he says that Durwood has sold Mosswood, drawn the money, and gone."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"I don't know. The detectives are searching for him, Mr. Hildyard says. Read it."

Pearl read it through slowly, then crumpled it up in her hand, and flung it from her.

"There goes our last hope of leaving Hebron," she said bitterly.

"I don't see why we should give up hope just at once," said Kathie, speaking more hopefully than she felt. "Durwood may be stopped before he has time to get far with his ill-gotten gains. Do not give up hope, papa dear, Mr. Hildyard says that they are trying to find Durwood; perhaps they will succeed, and this may only delay us a week or two after all."

"It is not so easy to find a man who does not wish to be found; we have proved that. But you are right, Kathie, it is foolish to give up all hope at once. We shall doubtless hear all particulars from Hildyard in a day or two."

Mr. Milner was right; the next week they received a letter from Mr. Hildyard, but it contained nothing on which they could build a hope of recovering the money Durwood had absconded with. Mr. Hildyard had, he wrote, left no stone unturned to find him, but without the least success. Mr. Milner had been so utterly unsuspicious, had trusted his agent so completely, that he had without the slightest difficulty been able to rob him, and disappear from the country before any one suspected his intentions. Thus the hope of leaving Hebron had to be abandoned, or at least given up for an indefinite time, and the old cloud of dreariness and poverty, heavier than ever now, settled down once more over the little family on Natal Kopje.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THAT FACE AGAIN.

"ARE you going away from home to day, Vere?" asked Mr. Brown one morning, as he stood beside his horse with one foot in the stirrup.

"Yes," replied Mr. Vere, "I am going out to the B—— battery this afternoon. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you. I was only going to say if you will be at home to-night I shall stay in Krugersdorp until to-morrow; but if not, I must make a point of coming home this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, I shall be back early. I don't suppose Miss Hetty will begin to be nervous until after sundown, will she?" he added, with a mischievous glance at Hetty.

"Nervous, indeed!" said she scornfully. "Mother and I wouldn't care a bit if you and father didn't come back for a week. We lived in a lonely colonial farm too long to have any nerves left."

"If you wish to offend Hetty," said Mr. Brown, "just suggest that it is possible for her to be afraid of anything."

"She is not always so brave," put in Oswald, coming in at that moment ready to accompany his father, "she used to be dreadfully afraid of George French's ostriches. I've known her go two miles out of her way rather than walk through their enclosure."

"Of course," said Hetty laughing. "I do not believe in running any unnecessary risks; but for my part, I shall not mind in the least if you don't come home to-night, Mr. Vere."

"She wouldn't say that if she thought there was the least danger of your staying away," said Oswald tauntingly.

"Happily there is not," said Mr. Vere. "I shall be back quite early, and I will leave my pistols on the table in the painting room, Miss Hetty, in case any one attacks the house before I return."

Hetty laughed, and thanked him, little dreaming how the light words would come back to her memory a few hours later, and how much would depend upon those pistols and her own courage and skill in using them.

After breakfast Hetty set out, accompanied by Alette and Mr. Vere's great dog Rollo, for a walk, to get fern roots and lily bulbs for her garden. They walked some distance, and at last came to a steep kopje, where in the crevices of the lichened rocks grew the coveted ferns, besides whole fields of yellow, white, and magenta flowers, and masses of the fluffy pale blue blossoms which Hetty had named Transvaal violets, not from any resemblance which they bore to the

modest little English flower, but because of their delicious, violet-like fragrance which filled all the air.

Hetty had half filled her basket with fern roots when an exclamation from Alette made her look up, and dropping her knife into the basket she hastened to the girl's side.

"What is the matter, Alette? Have you gone crazy?" she asked in astonishment; for Alette was dancing about, clapping her hands and uttering hysterical exclamations after the fashion of her race when excited or surprised.

"No, I'm not mad, but oh, Miss Hetty, look there!"

Hetty looked in the direction she pointed, but beyond a strip of dusty road along which a wagon drawn by a span of panting oxen was slowly moving, she saw nothing.

"Well, what is it? I do not see anything," she said.

"Don't you see that wagon, Miss Hetty?"

"Yes, of course I see it; but what then? I don't see anything strange about it."

"It's baas Han's wagon, Miss Hetty, rooi Hans Meukerk, my brother Peets baas. Oh! Miss Hetty, we'll see now if that old dohlos thrower told me true."

"Are you sure, Allette?" asked Hetty, now almost as excited as the girl herself, at the prospect of proving the truth of what the old Makatees seer had told them.

"Yes, I'm sure. Doesn't Miss Hetty know the oxen? I know them all, and that is baas Hans. Look how he holds his whip, and hear how he screams to the oxen!" And, without waiting for more, Alette flew down the kopje, followed more sedately by Hetty.

The young Dutchman, who had been nicknamed "rooi" Hans, from his fiery red hair and complexion, and his great partiality for red pugarees, recognising Hetty at once, stopped his oxen, and throwing down his long whip, hurried forward to meet her.

"A le wereld, Miss Brown!" he exclaimed, in a loud, delighted tone, and almost crushing her hand in his huge fingers, "where have you come from? I've been looking for your house all over the dorp, and I couldn't find it."

"We have not a house in the town yet;" Hetty explained. "We are living on a farm near here."

"On a farm! Has the old baas bought another farm, then? I thought he'd done with farms, and farming."

"With farming he has. No, we have not bought another farm, but we are living there until father is ready to built a house in the town."

"A le wereld! I should have thought he'd been here long enough to get a dozen houses built," exclaimed the young man, shaking his head, and looking much shocked and astonished at this dilatoriness on the part of Mr. Brown.

"We have been here long enough," said Hetty, laughing, "but father is not ready to build yet. Are all your people well, Mr. Niekerk?"

"Ja, they're all well, that is, they were when I left home, five weeks ago. I haven't heard from them since. A le wereld, Miss Brown! this Johannesburg's a big place, a wonderful place. Think, two years ago I shot bucks there where all those houses stand to-day. A le Magtig, it's wonderful!"

"It is, indeed," replied Hetty; then turning to Alette, who had been standing by, scarcely able to control her impatience, she said, "my girl wants to ask you how all her people have been getting on since she left."

"All her people? Oh, ja, it's Alette Skippars, isn't it? All your people are dead, Alette; the straw house burnt down with your ma in it, and your pa's under the ground——"

"Ach, no, baas Hans," cried Alette half frightened and yet guessing from his tone that things were not so bad as he represented. "I know the straw house was burnt down, and ma was burnt, too, but she is well now, and living with baas Hans' grandma, and Piet's working for baas Hans, is not that true?"

"Ja, it's true," answered he in surprise. "I see someone's been telling you, but why did you come to ask me if you knew already?"

Alette's eyes met Hetty's with a delighted flash.

"No, baas," she said, "no one told me. And is it true that pa has gone to work in the diamond mines?"

The young man regarded her angrily for a minute.

"How can you tell such a lie?" he exclaimed. "Someone must have told you. How else could you know? Old Klaas has been here, he told me he was coming up."

But Alette protested that she had neither seen nor spoken to the old Hottentot of whom he spoke, and then Hetty told him that it was from an old Makatee's "dohlos" thrower that Alette had obtained all the information she possessed with regard to her family. He was not so much surprised as she had expected.

"It is wonderful," he said, running his thick red fingers

through his bushy red curls. "It's wonderful; but I've heard of those old dohlos throwers before to-day. I've heard of them telling about things that have happened a thousand miles away, things they never could have heard of, and to people they'd never seen. I can't think where they get their power from—their father, the devil, I suppose."

"I don't see why we should think they derive their power from him if they do not use it for any wicked purpose," said Hetty.

"Ja, well, perhaps not," Hans admitted, looking as if the idea were new to him, as it certainly was. "But it's slecht for an old nigger like that to have such a power; why can't you or I have had it now?"

Hetty laughed.

"He is welcome to it for my part," she said. "I should be sorry to have such a power; I think it would prove a very troublesome possession."

"Do you think so? I'd like it; think, toch when my oxen got stolen or lost how easy it would be to get them again, and punish the niggers who took them. But I can't keep my wagon standing any longer; I must trek on if I'm to get to Pretoria this week. You'll remember me to your father and mother, Miss Brown."

"But you will come to the house and outspan, will you not? My father is not at home, but mother is, and she will be glad to see you and hear all about the people you left at home."

"No, thank you, I only inspanned half an hour ago, and I'm in a hurry to get off-loaded while this mooi weather lasts. I'll stop at your place on my way back."

Hetty and Alette stood still, watching the great heavy wagon until the cloud of dust raised by the oxen's feet hid it from sight. Then Alette turned triumphantly to her young mistress.

"The old man did know, Miss Hetty—the old man did know. Miss Hetty laughed at me for believing, but Tozeni was right; Mnyema doesn't lie."

Mr. Vere's business at the B battery took him much longer to transact than he had expected, and the sun had gone down when he once more mounted his horse to return home. He was not riding his own fleet beautiful Alba, but the little Basuto pony usually bestridden by Tozeni.

It was quite dark by the time he had traversed two miles

of the rocky narrow path, which he had chosen in preference to the broad wagon road as being shorter, and it was only by going very slowly and allowing the pony to pick his way among the loose broken fragments of stone which strewed the path that he could get along at all.

All at once, as he was riding slowly along, the reins lying loosely upon the animal's neck, blaming himself for not having taken the road, which, after all, would have proved the shortest way home, his horse stepped upon a sharp, jagged stone, and fell heavily, bringing its rider to the ground. Rising unhurt, though considerably shaken, he succeeded with some difficulty in pulling the pony out of the hole into which he had fallen.

"This won't do, will it, Chaka, old fellow?" he said, stroking the trembling creature's neck. "This won't do; we must go round by the road, after all, or we shall not get home till to-morrow morning." And twisting the bridle round his hand, he began to lead him forward.

In order to regain the road it was necessary to go back about a mile and a half along the narrow path they had come, and as the darkness was increasing all the time, and the horse had slightly lamed himself in the fall, this was a work of time. Just where the rough path widened into the wagon-road Mr. Vere stopped, and, lighting a match, looked at his watch. He found to his annoyance that it was already nine o'clock.

"Nine," he exclaimed; "and Chaka lame! It will be eleven before I get home. Miss Hetty will think I am putting her boasted courage to the test."

But, though vexed at the unavoidable delay, he was not uneasy, for there was little danger of anyone molesting the inmates of Klipkopjes. There was nothing there to excite anyone's cupidity. To be sure he had a tolerably large sum of money in the desk in his studio, but no one knew of that—and the farmhouse was quite out of the way of ordinary tramps and footpads.

"I wish I had not sent Tozeni away to Roodepoort this morning," he said to himself. "However, there is no danger, and they will not be nervous; Mrs. Brown is brave enough for anything; and Hetty does not know the meaning of fear."

Having thus disposed of the matter he walked on again with as rapid a step as Chaka's lameness would permit. The accident, annoying as it was, seemed to have banished the

sad and gloomy thoughts which up to the time his horse had fallen had possessed his mind, and pleasanter reflections seemed to have taken their place, to judge, at least, by the tender little smile which curved his lips, and the soft light which shone in his eyes. But suddenly the smile faded, the light died out and a stern bitter look of self-loathing succeeded.

"*I!*" he exclaimed, speaking aloud in the intensity of his self-condemning anguish; "I, to forget; I whose soul is stained with the blackest of all crimes, to dream such dreams. I! from whose touch or look she would shrink if she knew the truth. Am I forgetting that I am a ——?"

Just then, as if the last word which was added shudderingly under his breath had called up the phantom, there appeared before him, above a rock that overhung the road, the face he had seen looking at him through Hetty's parlour window months ago; a marble-white face, thin to emaciation, with great cavernous, dark eyes, full of hatred and menace—that dead man's face—the face of the man who with his own hand he had hurled into eternity. He stood rooted to the spot, horror seeming slowly to freeze the blood in his veins, powerless to remove his eyes from those whose stony gaze was fixed on him. He could never tell how long he stood thus; but, suddenly as it had appeared, the face vanished, and the awful spell was broken. He dropped his horse's bridle and sprang towards the spot where it had disappeared.

"It was no fancy!" he exclaimed. "No vision conjured up by a guilty conscience and a disordered brain; it was too real for that."

But though he searched and groped about for half-an-hour among the great rocks and boulders, there was nothing to reward him, and with sinking heart, and all his fears of insanity sharpened to the utmost, he returned to the place where he had left his horse.

"No, it was a fancy after all," he said. "My doom is sealed. Oh, God, what a fate; surely, surely, even my crime did not deserve such a fearful punishment. But it is of no use trying to fight against the doom Heaven has decreed," he added with intense bitterness. "The more fiercely I struggle against it, the more rapidly will even the semblance of sanity leave me; but it is too hard to bear, too terrible—oh, Father of Heaven, let me die first."

Plunged once more in gloomy thoughts, a black, im-

penetrable cloud of sorrow settling down upon heart and mind, he continued his way. The moon, which had shone out just in time to reveal to him the pile of rocks and the haunting face above, was lighting up the road.

When he was within a short distance of Klipkopjes he looked up suddenly, and perceived something which made him stand still in horror and astonishment, and set his heart beating wildly. Was it another fancy, he asked himself, or did he really see a lurid glow as from a great fire lighting up the sky over Klipkopjes, and casting a bright light on the hills around? No, it was no fancy; the air was full of smoke, and even as he looked there came a crash followed quickly by another, and a thick black column of smoke, and bright red sparks rose up into the air. It was no fancy, the farmhouse was on fire; Hetty was in danger, perhaps dead. The awful thought drove every other out of his mind, and leaping on his horse, he urged it forward at a mad gallop.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ROBBERS AT KLIPKOPJES—HETTY A HEROINE.

THAT was a long day to Hetty; her mother complained of cold, and headache, and retired to her own room soon after the early dinner. Hetty practised a little on the piano, played for a while on Mr. Vere's organ, and gardened a little, but nothing interested her long. She felt depressed and out of sorts; a very unusual state of things with bright sunshiny Hetty. But, to tell the truth, Hetty was not quite the perfectly free-from-care, light-hearted child she had been when she left her old home where she had never known even a passing cloud of sorrow. Neither, so far as she was personally concerned, had she known one here, but she had for months been living on terms of familiar friendship with one whose life was darkly shadowed, and something of that shadow had fallen over her. Moreover, ever since that night that the vision, or phantom, or whatever it was, had so startled Mr. Vere, the fear of the terrible fate he dreaded overtaking him had been present with her. There is nothing which so soon ages and matures one as a constant fear and an ever-present anxiety, especially a fear of which we cannot speak, which must be borne in silence; and Hetty seemed to herself to have grown years older in the last few months, and to have left the old, careless days

very far behind. She never thought of wondering why the secret sorrows of this man, who, a short time ago had been a stranger to her, should trouble her so deeply; she only knew that they did trouble her, and that if the blow which he feared actually fell upon him, it would at the same time crush all the brightness out of her own life. She could no more help his sorrow being hers than she could help breathing. Neither her father nor mother, nor Philip Vere himself, noticed any change in her. To them she was just the same sun-bright, laughter-loving creature she had always been. But the change was there for all that, the frost-breath of sorrow had touched her, and she would never be the same again.

Hetty was glad when the evening shadows began to fall, and the long day drew to a close. She carried her mother's tea to her room, took her own there with her, and then went out and gave Alette her's. The girl lingered in the dining-room, finding half-a-dozen unaccustomed and unnecessary tasks to do there, then she brought in the tray of cups and saucers, and placed the sugar and milk ready on the table for the early coffee which she always carried to her mistress' and Hetty's rooms in the morning. She was so long over this, and fidgeted about the room so restlessly, looking so uncomfortable all the time, that at last Hetty's attention was drawn to her. "What is the matter with you to-night, Alette? Why do you not go to bed?" she asked, after watching her for some minutes in silence.

Alette hesitated, then covering her face with a corner of her apron as was her custom when she felt embarassed, or when she was about to make what she feared would be considered an unreasonable request, she said, "We're so alone to-night, Miss Hetty, and I feel a little bit bang. Can't I put my bed down in a corner of Miss Hetty's room?"

"Of course you may, Alette; but what are you afraid of, pray?"

"Of people," replied Alette lucidly. "Miss Hetty must remember that we are not living in Kafirland now, and everybody is bad in this Transvaal. Think, toch, Miss Hetty, if anyone came here to-night!"

"Well, if anyone did, what then?"

"They'd kill us all, Miss Hetty, before we could make the people on the next farm or in the town hear us. Ach, toch, Miss Hetty, I wish Mr. Vere would come."

"I wish he would," said Hetty, very earnestly; "but it is too early to expect him yet, and if he should not come until to-morrow, there would be nothing to be afraid of. Who do you suppose would dream of interfering with us?"

"I don't know, Miss Hetty, but I'm bang. I'm not like Miss Hetty, afraid of nothing; and there are people who'd come just to frighten us, if they knew we were alone."

"They wouldn't have much difficulty in frightening you, at any rate; you are a miserable coward, Alette. I am ashamed of you. I will tell you what we will do if anyone does come and try to frighten us; we will get Mr. Oswald's gun, and fire a few blank charges at them, to frighten them in their turn. Now don't let us talk any more nonsense," she added seriously, "or we shall become nervous and silly. Go and bring your bed, and put it down in my room, and then I'll lock up the house."

Hetty drew down the curtains, and, after going to her mother's room to see if she required anything, and finding her asleep, she went into the parlour and sat down to sing. She sang first, all the old Scotch ballads and sweet pathetic Irish songs she and her father loved; then all Mr. Vere's favourites; and last of all the familiar old hymns she had sung in the farm house at home. She played on, one thing after another, not noticing how the time was passing, until she heard the deep-voiced clock in the dining-room strike nine, when, closing the piano, she sprang up. Nine o'clock, and Mr. Vere had not returned! What could be keeping him? But perhaps he had come back and she had not heard him. That was most likely the case. She went out into the dark, damp passage, and peeped into his room. All was dark and silent there; he had not come yet. Then she opened the parlour door and, going out into the verandah, listened intently. All was very still outside; there was no sound but the deep, far-off rumble of the batteries, and though she listened a long time she heard no sound of a horse's hoofs approaching. A strong, indefinable fear came over her, a great sinking of heart, as she went back into the house and shut the door. It was past nine, and he had said he would be back early! Had anything happened to him? He was carrying a large sum of money with him, she knew. Had someone else, aware of this, waylaid and murdered him? This was not the Cape Colony, where such things were almost unheard of. No, all sorts of people were gathered at Witwatersrandt—blacklegs, reprobates, *mauvais*

sujets from all parts of the world. More than once she had heard her father say that it was unsafe for a man, even if he were armed, to travel alone after dark. A hundred fears rushed through her mind as she stood watching the hands of the clock slowly moving, and listening to the ticking which sounded so startlingly loud in the intense stillness. At last it struck ten, and then a new thought took possession of her mind—the awful thought that perhaps that which he feared had come upon him, and he had been unable to reach home; and falling on her knees, trembling and sick with fear, she prayed earnestly, passionately, that he might return safe and well.

As she rose to her feet once more, she heard a sound outside—a step on the verandah—and her first glad thought was that her prayer had received instant answer, and that he had returned. In the intense joy and thankfulness that succeeded, she could almost have smiled at her fears of a moment before. But the sound was repeated—slow, shuffling, stealthy—not in the least like the quick, decided step she knew so well. It was not Mr. Vere. Who could it be? Someone was prowling about the house—someone who had no right to be there;—someone who had come for no good. She listened; and presently she heard the steps move away to the other end of the verandah, and voices speaking in low tones. There were more than one, then! Hetty's heart began to beat in quick, uneven throbs, and she remembered how utterly alone and defenceless she was. Even Panbani, the stupid, sleepy, old driver was away, having that afternoon received permission to visit some friends in the town. Going softly to the window—the room fortunately was in darkness—she drew aside a corner of the blind, and peeped out. It was dark, the moon had risen, but was not yet high enough to shed light upon that side of the house, but she could dimly discern the outlines of the figures of two natives in a corner of the verandah. It was not light enough to make out their features, but, just as she was about to drop the curtain, one of the men pulled out his pipe, and, striking a match, proceeded to light it. The little flame lit up for a moment the dark corner, and, as it shone full upon him, she recognised the evil face of the man who had so insolently seized Tommy's bridle, and tried to take him from her, that day soon after she had come to Klipkopjes, and who had been so severely chastised by the stranger. She let the curtain fall, and turned back into the room once more. She had

been afraid before, now she was terrified beyond measure. How well she remembered the man's face, with the small eyes full of evil. Doubtless he had not forgotten that day any more than she had, and now, knowing that she was alone, had come to revenge himself for the punishment he had received through her. Oh! if her father were but here! If Mr. Vere would only come! Her heart beat so loudly that it seemed to her the men crouching outside must hear it.

The minutes dragged slowly on, more like hours than minutes, then Hetty's courage began to rise, her old brave spirit to reassert itself, and she determined to hear what the men were saying. But in order to do so she must go into Mr. Vere's room, under the window of which they were crouching. She rose softly, and slipping off her shoes, which, however, would have made but little noise on the ant-heap floor, she stole noiselessly as a shadow through the room, across the passage, and into Mr. Vere's room. All was black darkness in there, and feeling her way lest she should stumble over something, she reached the window. Kneeling down beside it she pressed her ear to the blind. The natives were just outside; only the thickness of the glass and the rush window-blind separated her from them. How easily they could come in, she thought; one powerful push and the rotten, old window-sash would yield, and they would be in the room. Hetty did not much fear this, however, for she judged that if they had intended to effect an entrance that way they would have done so at once. They were talking in such low, indistinct tones that though Hetty strained her ears to the utmost she could not hear what they said, nor even in what language they were speaking, and on that much depended, for if they spoke Zulu or Kafir she would be able to understand all they said, find out their plans, and, if possible, defeat them; but the Basuto tongue was incomprehensible to her, and even if they spoke loudly enough for her to hear, she would not be able to understand. By-and-by, either forgetting caution or deeming it unnecessary, they began to speak in louder tones; the man whose voice Hetty recognised as belonging to the insolent Zulu seemed to be expostulating with the other, and to her relief they spoke Kafir.

"Are you sure?" the one was asking. "I know I saw a light as we came round the house."

"What of that?" demanded the other. "I'm quite sure

that there's no one in the house but women. The old Umlunga and the boy went away this morning, and the young Umlunga went away too, and so did his boy, Tozeni, and none of them have come back. Do you think I am a fool that I would not make sure of that? There's no one in the house but the girl and her mother and the Hottentot maid, and if they hear any noise outside they'll be afraid to come and find out what it is."

"But you said the young Umlunga was not gone on a long journey; he may come back at any moment."

"Of course he may," replied the other sneeringly, "and he will come back long before we are ready for him if you mean to stay talking till morning. I wish I had come alone. A coward like you is worse than no one."

"I am not a coward," returned his companion doggedly. "But am I a fool that I should rush into a house before I know who is in it? And I want to know what is going to be my share in this night's work."

"Oh, yes, you find it easier to talk about your share than to begin the work. You can take the horse and I'll take the money."

The other snarled like a spiteful dog, "Yes, I take the horse that's sure to be recognised and brought back, and you'll take the money, that bears no mark and tells no tales; that's like you."

"And it's like you to waste half the night talking. Look here, we'll take the money whether it's much or little and divide it, and take the horse to Malmani and sell it, and share what we get for it; neither of us will keep it, Langele."

This arrangement evidently satisfied his companion, and he seemed ready to begin the business without any more delay.

"Is the money in this room?" he asked. "It would not be hard to knock in this old window, and if there's no one here it doesn't matter how much noise we make."

"No, no; it's not here, but in the next room, and we mustn't make any more noise than we can help. Let us first go to the stable and get the horse and tie it to the fence, and then we'll get through the window of the other room, and get the money."

So that was their plan. Well, at any rate it was a great relief to find that their business was not to murder in cold blood every inmate of the lonely farmhouse, though she

knew they would not stop at murder if anyone attempted to interfere with them in the carrying out of their burglarious intentions. And Hetty certainly did intend to interfere with them, but how? What could she do? A dozen plans flashed into her mind, to be discarded as impracticable the next moment. Should she go and rouse her mother, and obtain her advice and help? But no, there was no time for that; besides, her mother was ill, the fear and excitement might bring on serious illness, perhaps even cause her death. Her next thought was of Alette. But of what use? A mouse or a mosquito would be of more help in an emergency than the Hottentot girl. No; whatever was done she must do it herself and at once, for already the two desperadoes, after each taking a deep draught from a black bottle, which one of them produced from a leather bag, had left the verandah and gone off in the direction of the stable. Hetty was for a moment inclined to steal silently out, fly to her own room or her mother's, and wait until the men, having taken the money, horse, and anything else they wanted, had made good their escape. But she put the temptation bravely from her, not without a recollection of Oswald's taunts, and rising from her corner under the window, she went, as quickly as her trembling limbs and her fear of making the slightest sound would let her, to the kitchen where Rollo was sleeping. He was an ally on whom she could safely rely, and she wondered that he had not been aroused from his light canine slumbers before, by the sense of an hostile presence near him. He sprang up the instant she opened the door, and bounded towards her."

"Hush, Rollo, hush," she whispered laying her hand warningly in his neck. "They will hear you."

The dog seemed to understand her, for he looked suspiciously at the door and listened intently. "Now, come with me," she said, and obediently the great creature followed her.

She went through the dining room, through the parlour, and into the little room once more, pausing a moment at the door of the studio, to breathe a short, fervent prayer to God for help and protection; she softly opened the door, and, followed closely by Rollo, she went in. Her nerves were strung to the utmost tension. She knew that now the slightest sound could be heard by the men outside; if she knocked a book off the table, or stumbled against a picture-

frame, her fate, and perhaps the fate of the two unconscious sleepers in the other part of the house, would be sealed.

The knowledge that all depended on her would have deprived many another woman of all her presence of mind; but it only braced Hetty's nerves. After softly commanding Rollo to lie down, she went to the table where Mr. Vere's pistols lay—those pistols about which they had jested that morning. Could it be possible that it was only that morning? It seemed ages ago. She found them at last and a box of cartridges, and carrying them to the window, she proceeded, by the light which came faintly in through a crack in the sash, to load every one of the six chambers; then, mounting upon a chair, she drew aside the curtain and looked out. The men were busy, endeavouring to unfasten the somewhat complicated lock of the stable door. The beautiful white horse was safe as yet. She let down the top sash noiselessly, and resting the pistol upon the edge, fired it deliberately close over the heads of the two men.

The effect on them was exactly what she had hoped and expected. The men dropped the tools with which they had been trying to pick the lock, and fled round the corner of the stable, one with fierce oaths and curses, accusing the other of having purposely deceived him, which he as fiercely denied. Hetty fancied that now, having discovered that the little garrison was neither unprepared or unarmed, they had abandoned the attack; but she was mistaken. Just as she was about to descend from her chair, the burly Zulu rushed towards the window and hurled a huge stone through it—a stone which, if it had struck Hetty, would certainly have killed her; but providentially it only crashed through, tore away part of the lower sash, and fell upon a pile of frail, delicately-carved picture-frames which were piled up under the window, crushing them to fragments. Half frantic with terror, but without losing her presence of mind, Hetty fired three shots in quick succession close past the man's ear, while Rollo, with something between a roar and a yell, dashed through the window, caught him by the throat, and dashed him to the ground. For a minute or two man and dog struggled, and rolled over on the earth, an indistinguishable mass, but at length the former extricated himself, and, waiting for no more, sped away after his companion, who by this time was half way down the kopje.

The fight was fairly over now, and she had won it. The men were in full flight, and Hetty knew that it would be

long before they ventured to make another raid on Klipkopjes. So after firing a shot or two after them to hasten their steps, she hurried into the other part of the house, in order to calm the fears of her mother and Alette, who had no doubt been aroused by the pistol shots and the loud crash of broken glass. But, to her surprise and thankfulness, upon going to her mother's room, she found her calmly sleeping. Her room was so far from the studio, the walls of the old Dutch farmhouse were so thick, and the sleeping draught she had taken before retiring so strong, that not a sound of the conflict had reached her. She had been peacefully asleep all the time, unconscious of the terrible danger through which her child was passing. Pressing her lips to her mother's brow, and breathing a prayer of thankfulness, Hetty went to her own room. She found Alette sitting up in bed rubbing her eyes, and looking the picture of sleepy stupidity. Something had aroused her from her profound slumbers, but she did not know what it had been, and it was easy for Hetty to reassure the girl and persuade her to lie down again, and in a few minutes she was sleeping heavily once more. Now that the danger was over, and nothing more remained to be done, poor Hetty's nerve and courage quite forsook her. Sinking down on her knees beside her bed she buried her face in her hands, while, trembling and nerveless, she burst into a flood of childish tears.

But the excitement and dangers of that night were not yet over. Hetty was destined to go through an ordeal fraught with almost as much danger as the one through which she had already passed. She had not knelt there long when she began to perceive a strong smell of burning, and, starting up, she found that the room was filling with smoke. She hastened to the studio from which direction it appeared to be coming, and once there saw what had happened. The whole room was lighted up by the glare of fire, and filled with clouds of smoke. The stable was on fire. The stable, and Mr. Vere's beautiful horse locked up in it. The natives had either accidentally dropped a lighted match upon the loose straw lying about the door, or had purposely set fire to it. There was not a moment to lose if she would save the poor horse from being burnt to death. She went into the next room—Mr. Vere's bedroom—and taking from a peg in the wall a thick overcoat, she enveloped herself in its heavy folds; then going to the kitchen, she took with nervous haste the key of the stable from the rusty nail on which it hung.

She flew across the yard, and in less time than it takes to tell had unlocked the stable door. The whole of one side and part of the roof were in flames, and the poor, imprisoned horse was snorting and plunging in a state of frantic terror. Hetty contrived with some difficulty to untie the rope which fastened him to the stall. But she found that it was one thing to unfasten the maddened creature, and another to persuade him to allow himself to be led out of the burning building, the air of which was already as hot as that of a furnace. Hetty urged, and coaxed, and patted him gently, called him by his name, and finally tried to pull him towards the door, but in vain; the terrified animal refused to move, and poor Hetty was in despair. What was she to do? She could not leave the poor horse to perish. Suddenly a thought like an inspiration flashed into her mind, and dropping the rope she ran back to the house, and tearing down the thin curtain from the studio window sped back to the stable with it.

Avoiding the hoofs of the kicking, rearing, Alba as by a miracle, Hetty succeeded in bandaging his eyes. He ceased to plunge and kick instantly, and passively suffered himself to be led out.

The walls and thatched roof of the stable were by this time wrapped in flames, which threw a lurid glare far around over the stony kopjes. Hetty and Alba were scarcely outside the door when part of the roof fell in with a crash, and sparks and pieces of burning wood dropped in a hot shower around them. Hetty untied the bandage from the horse's eyes, and then came another and louder crash, and she felt a short, agonising pain as a great piece of burning wood struck her across the wrists, and then she remembered no more until she opened her eyes to find herself lying on the sofa in the parlour, her wrists bandaged, her hair wet with vinegar, and her mother and Philip Vere bending anxiously over her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LESLIE KEITH.

THE sky was heavy with thick clouds that hung low over the hill-tops; the wind wailed mournfully over the kopjes; the grass was short and brown, affording little sustenance to

the miserable donkeys and mules that wandered over them; every vaal-bush leaf was heavy with an unwholesome burden of fine dust; and the Hebron diamond kopjes, not the most cheerful of places even under a clear sky and bright sun, looked unutterably dreary and dismal on a certain wretched morning in the middle of July. Kathie Milner shivered and drew closer around her the shabby old shawl she wore as she walked along over Natal Kopje. She had been in her father's claim all the morning sorting for him.

Mr. Milner worked nowadays with only one Kafir to help him, and he permitted Kathie or Pearl to sort for him. They would gladly have helped him with the harder work of the claim, but this he would never allow. Sorting on such a morning was anything but pleasant work, and half-a-dozen times her father had told Kathie to leave off and go home; but she had refused to go until the work was finished, and stood by the great tub sorting patiently sieveful after sieveful of wet gravel until the icy, winter wind had chilled her through and through, and the sorter had fallen more than once from her blue, half-frozen fingers. When the last sieveful had been sorted she turned homewards. She might have hurried to get out of the cold wind, but the thought of all the bareness and wretchedness at home caused her steps to lag.

A dreary winter this had been for the Milners—a winter of such want, hardships, and privations as they had never known in all their lives before. Mr. Milner's health was far from good, and his spirits had broken down completely since the night that he had received Mr. Hildyard's telegram informing him of Durwood's theft; and Kathie knew that he was altogether unfit for the life of toil and exposure which he was obliged to lead. The winter was trying them all sadly; even Syd, always until now strong and healthy, began to look thin and delicate; while poor Clive seemed to grow every day more pale and fragile, and to know that his increasing weakness and delicacy was caused by want of proper food and sufficient clothing, was torture to those who loved him. Utterly alone and friendless too were they now, for Lena and Gabriel were in Germany, kind-hearted Towser Chips was in Klerksdoorp, and Ambie Hildyard far away in Johannesburg. It was little wonder that Kathie felt very desolate and hopeless as she walked slowly over the gravel heaps, disputing every inch of the way with the fierce wind that tried to drive her back, tore her hat and shawl away

from her, and every instant dashed a fresh shower of sharp sand into her face. She bowed her head and hurried on, scarcely looking where she went, until all at once she came unexpectedly upon a claim where one solitary worker stood bending over his sorting tub. Only his profile was turned to her, but Kathie recognised him at once—it was Mr. Wood, the young digger who bore such an unaccountable resemblance to Graham Keith. She had not seen him since the day she had met him in Mrs. Roberts' tent at the "new rush," and she was startled to see how terribly ill he looked. His sorter was grasped in one hand, and it was painful to note with what fierce, almost despairing energy he turned over the wet, glittering gravel. Kathie stood watching him, half fascinated as he tossed the gravel out of his sieve, and filled it again with rapid movements. She could not but feel a deep interest in this young man, who seemed so lonely and friendless, and who was so strangely like Graham Keith. More than ever like him now that his face was in repose, and the hard, defiant expression in the dark blue eyes could not be read. For a long time Kathie stood there looking at him, till at length it occurred to her that, as his heap of gravel was nearly finished, he would soon turn round from his tub and see her, and very probably be annoyed to find himself being so intently watched. Just as she was about to go he dropped his sorter on to the stones, and she saw him bend over the tub, grasp something in his hand and hold it up to the light. Was it a diamond? Most sincerely Kathie hoped so, and she was turning away a second time when she heard him exclaim:

"At last! but oh, my God, it has come too late!" and the next moment he had fallen senseless upon the stones.

Kathie sprang down the bank and stood beside him. His face was death-like, not only pale with the pallor of sudden faintness, but also with the pinched, white look of hunger, more terrible to see. He had fallen against a sharp, jagged stone and a stream of blood was oozing from a deep cut in his forehead. For a minute or two Kathie stood helplessly looking down at him, not knowing what to do; then she seized the sprinkler, and plunging it into a bucket which stood near, she plentifully besprinkled him with the ice-cold and not over clean water; then taking off her shawl she folded it up and placed it under his head. She did not like to leave him there alone, and insensible, but feeling certain that he ought at once to have more efficient help than she

was able to render, she was about to hasten back to her father's claim, and ask him to come to the young man's assistance, when she heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Thinking they were those of one of the diggers, and without stopping to make sure, she began hurriedly: "Will you please come to——" and then paused, crimson with vexation and embarrassment to meet the grave, astonished eyes of Graham Keith.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked, raising his hat with distant courtesy; and then, catching sight of the prostrate figure at her feet, he added, "Is your friend ill? What is the matter?"

"He has fainted," she explained briefly. "I was just going for help; perhaps you can restore him to consciousness."

Graham hastily took from his pocket a small hunting flask of brandy, and springing down the stony bank, knelt beside the young digger. As he did so, an exclamation of astonishment escaped his lips: "Do you know him?" he asked. "What is his name?"

"I do not know him," replied Kathie. "I believe his name is Wood."

"Poor lad," said Graham softly, placing the unconscious man's head on his arm, and trying to force some of the brandy between his clenched teeth. "His name is not Wood, Miss Milner, but Leslie Keith; he is my cousin."

Kathie was not much surprised; she had known that his striking likeness to Graham could not be merely a coincidence, but she thought that it was rather strange that a near relative of the wealthy owner of Home Woods should be poor, friendless, and toiling as a diamond-digger in Hebron.

"He is my cousin," continued Graham, as she did not speak. "I lost sight of him some time ago. Can you tell me how long he has been here?"

"I do not know certainly. I fancy about two years, but it may be longer;" and then she added involuntarily, "He has been very unlucky, I believe."

"Poor lad," said Graham pityingly, once more. "That is a very ugly cut," he added, "I must bandage it at once. Miss Milner, pardon my troubling you; but I do not wish to move him. Will you take my handkerchief from my pocket and fold it into a narrow bandage, please?"

Kathie obeyed silently, wondering what fate it was that had a second time thrown her and Graham Keith together

under circumstances in which the services of both were indispensable, and instead of coldly avoiding him she could do nothing but obediently follow his directions. She turned so pale while she was helping him to adjust the bandage, that when it was finished, he laid his cousin back on the improvised cushion and handed her the little brandy flash saying concernedly:

"Pray, take some brandy, Miss Milner, this unpleasant business and the cold wind have made you faint.

But Kathie coldly declined. "I am not faint," she said, "I do not need it, thank you," and she wondered if it were possible that he knew that she was feeling sick and faint for want of food, or guessed that she had breakfasted upon a slice of sour, brown bread, and a cup of weak tea, nearly six hours ago.

She need not have feared, for Graham was far from guessing what very low water it was with the Milners, though he knew from the fact of their remaining on the diggings that they must be poor, and he looked at her as she stood pale, and shivering against Leslie Keith's "baby," in her thin, much-worn dress and the old cloth jacket which offered such slight resistance to the fierce, bitter wind, and he felt half ashamed of his own thick overcoat and warm gloves. His memory went back to the last time he had seen her in England, and he remembered distinctly the pretty brown velvet dress and cap she had worn, how exquisitely dainty had been her gloves and shoes, and every detail of her pretty travelling costume; and he almost found it hard to believe that the girl who had said good-bye to him that day at the Beechwood station, so beautifully and richly dressed, so bright, happy, and lighthearted, could really be identical with this pale, weary-looking, and more than shabby girl whose eyes had such a tired look in them, and whose lips seemed to have forgotten how to smile. All the anger and bitterness died out of his heart as he looked at her. How much of care and sorrow she must have known to bring that look into her face! And why was it that she and Ambie Hildyard were not married? Surely a four years' engagement was long enough. Was it possible that the engagement no longer existed? He glanced at the slight, gloveless hands that were clasped together on the side of the "baby" sieve. The diamond ring was gone.

Graham's heart beat quickly as he noticed its absence. To be sure that proved nothing, she might have taken it off

or lost it. But if not—if she were no longer engaged to Ambie Hildyard—what was it to him? What right had he to be glad, he asked himself? It *could* be nothing to him. But though he was angry with himself for what he called his weakness, his folly, he glanced again and again at the tightly clasped, half frozen hands, and every time felt more glad that the diamond was gone.

"He is remaining unconscious very long," said Kathie presently, recovering herself, and glancing at Leslie Keith's still, white face, which, in spite of all Graham's efforts, showed no sign of returning consciousness.

"Yes," replied Graham, "it is more than a mere fainting fit. He must be moved at once. Does he live far from here, do you know?"

"Not very far; his tent is at the foot of the kopje. Shall I send some one to help you to take him there?"

"If you will be so good; the sooner he is out of this cold wind the better."

Kathie hurried away and soon dispatched to Graham's aid half-a-dozen burly Basutos whom she found working a machine on the top of the kopje.

The little, ragged tent to which, at Graham's request, they carried his cousin, told such a tale of poverty and want as wrung his heart. There was not so much as a crust of bread or a quart of meal to be seen, and there was no sign of a fire having been made for several days. Was it possible that the poor fellow had been actually—literally starving? It looked like it. Graham knelt down beside the mattress on which the men had laid his cousin, administering brandy, and chafing his ice-cold hands until at last his efforts were rewarded, and the hollow, dark blue eyes opened, and looked unrecognisingly into his; but the next moment recognition took the place of the dazed, bewildered look. His pale face flushed crimson, and he would have sprung up, but Graham held him down.

"No, do not get up; lie still; you are ill," he said, in his quiet determined tone, which few people ever saw fit to resist.

The young man sank gaspingly back upon the bed.

"So you have found me out, Graham Keith," he said bitterly.

"Yes, I have found you. Thank heaven that I have; it was time, Leslie."

"And now that you have," said the other still more

bitterly. "Now that you have seen me, and are able to report that I am in as wretched a plight as my worst enemies and my dearest friends could wish, perhaps you will be good enough to go and leave me alone."

"I will," said Graham, calmly rising and divesting himself of his overcoat deliberately. "I will go with pleasure in half an hour, if you are still inhospitable enough to insist upon it; but in the meantime is there nothing I can tell you —nothing you wish to ask about your friends at home?"

His cousin turned impatiently away with something that sounded very like an oath; but presently, finding that Graham was quite determined to remain where he was until he had heard and told everything that he wished, he burst out with:

"My friends, who were ready to impute to me every meanness—to call me all that was bad! No, I do not wish to hear of them. I am well rid of such friends, and they are well rid of a scoundrel and spendthrift, who was a disgrace and a dishonour to the good old name of Keith, which had always been so stainlessly borne."

"Who said that?" asked Graham quietly.

"You know who said it—Colonel Keith."

"And was Colonel Keith the only friend you possessed whose good opinion was worth having?"

"The others thought the same; and they were right," he added, less passionately. "I was a spendthrift and a ne'er-do-well, and he paid my debts more than once before he cast me off. But he lied when he said that I spent my time in idle revelry. I worked harder at college than any other fellow, except perhaps you, and I always meant to pay back every farthing I had cost him. The knowledge that he was supporting me embittered every hour of my life, and led me —but there," he broke off in a tone of impatient self-scorn, "I need not excuse myself, or blame him for what I did. I was a disgrace to the name, though he was a greater, with his hypocrisy, his narrow, sordid soul, and his vindictive, domineering temper."

"Do not speak ill of the dead," interrupted Graham. "Whatever were his faults they must be forgotten now."

"Oh, yes," said the other bitterly, "his faults must be forgotten; he must be forgiven and spoken reverently of, while the lives he wrecked and ruined with his infernal pride and selfishness must drag themselves out as best they can."

"Colonel Keith may have wronged you, Leslie, but what had your mother ever done that you should leave her without one word?"

The hard, reckless look on the young man's face changed to one almost of shame as he answered:

"Because I was a scoundrel and a fool as well, I suppose, but I thought she sided with Uncle Keith against me, and I was maddened by his taunts and threats. I know that is no excuse to you who never do anything but what is exactly right, but I was beside myself with rage at his unjust reproaches and accusations, and at the insults he had heaped upon me in public, and I determined to leave England and not return until I could take with me money enough to pay back every penny he had spent upon me since my father's death. I know I was a brute to leave my mother in the way I did, but it was all of a piece with the rest of my conduct. But tell me, is she well and happy now?"

"She is well; but happy! Leslie, happiness was beyond her power when she knew not where you were gone, or even whether you were alive or dead."

"Where is she?"

"In London now; until lately she was at the old place in Scotland."

"And tell me, Graham—though perhaps you think I have forfeited my right to ask—she has never wanted for anything?"

"No, she has wanted nothing but you."

After that Leslie Keith lay still for a long time—a very sad sombre look on his face. At length he said:

"I suppose Colonel Keith left my mother an annuity?"

"No, he did not."

"Oh, he made her suffer for my sins; it was like him. But you told me that she had never wanted; her own income was the merest trifle."

Graham smiled. "Do you think, Leslie, that your mother would be suffered to want for anything while my mother and I had plenty?" he asked.

An expression of keenest pain and shame crossed Leslie Keith's face.

"Then," he said, "it is not my fault that my mother has not been reduced to beggary. Colonel Keith was right. I *am* a scoundrel. Oh, mother!" and in an agony of shame and self-reproach he turned his head away, covering his face with his hands. But, after a minute or two, he re-

covered himself; and, holding out one thin, toil-roughened hand to Graham, said, in a voice which he strove in vain to render calm, "I thank you from my soul, Graham. You think I cared nothing for my mother, and I deserve that you should think so, and she too. I have been an undutiful, ungrateful son to her, but I shall never forget that you have taken care of her—that you have ——"

"Hush, hush," interrupted Graham, taking the outstretched hand and grasping it heartily. "You owe me no thanks; your mother was almost as dear to me as my own. Now, tell me of yourself; have you been living here ever since you left home?"

"No, I came here a year ago; before that I was in Kimberley. I was a fool not to stay there, but I could not save money there, and I thought that if I came here I might make a fortune, or at least enough to pay back all I owed Colonel Keith."

"You did not know then that he was dead?"

"No, I did not learn that until a few months ago, when I saw the announcement of his death in an old newspaper which was pasted up on the wall of one of the diggers' shanties. And you are the master of Home Woods, Graham," he added. "Dear old place, I wonder you could leave it."

"I am not the master of Home Woods, Leslie," said Graham quietly.

The young man started up, but fell back panting upon his pillows.

"I believe I'm done for at last," he gasped, pressing his hand to his heart. "You have come in time to see the last of me, Graham. But what do you mean—you have not sold the old place, surely?"

"It has never been mine to sell; Uncle Keith did not leave Home Woods to me."

"Not leave it to you! The infernal old scoundrel. To whom did he leave it to, then?"

"To Graham Keith, of Strathearn. Once more, Leslie, let me remind you that he is dead. He had a right to do what he pleased with his own."

"He had no right to leave Home Woods away from you, after bringing you up as his heir, and making the slave he did of your mother," he said fiercely.

"My mother did nothing for him for the sake of a reward."

"I know that; she is the sweetest and most unselfish soul in the world. Is she with you, Graham?"

Graham shook his head without speaking.

"She is well, I hope," said the young man anxiously, for Graham's face had grown strangely sad and grave.

"Yes, she is well," he replied with a smile of wonderful brightness and sweetness. "She is *well*, in the best and truest sense of the word."

"Graham!" exclaimed the other, guessing his meaning, "You have not—she is not *dead*"

"Yes, I have lost my mother, Leslie—for this world."

His companion was profoundly touched.

"Graham, old fellow," he said, laying his hand on his cousin's arm, "I never heard of this. It is cruelly hard on you, and I have been imagining you and Aunt Lucy so happy together at Home Woods."

"She is happy, Leslie, there is no doubt of that—happy and blessed for ever."

"And now my mother is all alone in the world," said Leslie, after a few minutes' silence.

"No, she is not alone, Dora is with her. Dora has come back a widow, Leslie."

A sudden flush rose to the young man's pale cheek, and he shaded his eyes with his hand. "Poor Dora," he said softly. "I am glad she is with mother. Where did her husband die."

"In Bombay, a year ago."

"Did he treat her badly, Graham?"

"Very badly, I believe; I always feared he would."

"I always knew he would—the scoundrel! Poor little Dora!"

After that he turned his face away from his cousin, and did not say another word. Presently he fell into a restless, uneasy sleep, Graham sitting and looking at him, the grave expression of his face deepening as he noticed how fearfully emaciated he was, how difficult was his breathing, and how he started and muttered in his sleep.

"Poor fellow!" he said pityingly; "he has paid dearly for his harebrained folly. Thank heaven that I found him before it was too late. A very little more of this sort of thing and I should never have pulled him through. I must walk into the village, or town, or whatever they call the place, and get in some supplies. He must have something at once; he has been starving it seems by the look of

things. I don't like to leave him alone though ; I wonder if I can find someone who will come and stay with him until I come back."

Just then there came a gentle tap on the tent pole, and Sydney Milner's bright, dark eyes looked in. His sister had sent him to ask if Mr. Wood was better, he said.

"He will be better soon, I hope," replied Graham ; "he is asleep now. You are one of Mr. Milner's little boys, are you not ?"

"I am Sydney Milner," answered the boy, drawing himself up proudly; he was nearly thirteen, and objected to being called a "little" boy.

"It was you who came to fetch me when Mrs. Roberts' child was ill, was it not ?"

"Yes, I went on Mr. Brandt's old, white mule ; don't you remember ?" said Syd, smiling at the recollection.

"Are you very busy just now, Sydney ?"

"No, I have finished my lessons. Can I do anything for you ?" he added, with ready politeness.

"You can, if you will, do me a great favour. I want to get something from the village, and I do not like to leave Mr.—Wood alone. Will you, if you have time, stay with him until I return ?"

"Oh yes, I can stay ; or I could go down town for you if you like."

"Thank you, but I think I should prefer to go myself; you see I should walk faster than you could."

"I should run," said Syd. "I always run wherever I go."

"Do you ? and does no one tell you not ?"

"Kathie, my sister, does sometimes ; she says it's bad for me, but I can't help it. If I have anything to do I like to do it quickly."

Graham smiled down at him. He was beginning to take a great liking to this dark-eyed, bright-faced boy with his sprightly, gentle manners, and manly, independent air. "You and I are alike in that," he said. "But I think I must do the running this time, and leave you in charge of my patient."

Graham walked quickly into the town, and laid in a supply of such things as the nearest grocery store could furnish—bread, butter, eggs, jelly, coffee, sugar, and chocolate—and hastened back again. He found his cousin still asleep, and Sydney faithfully keeping watch beside him.

"Now," said he, when he had disposed of his numerous

packages, "I am going to get dinner ready. Are you a good cook, Sydney?"

"I can cook a little," Syd admitted modestly.

"What can you cook?"

"I can make tea and coffee and roaster-cakes, and broil meat on a gridiron."

"A very creditable list indeed; and do you know how to make soup?"

"I don't know about soup. I could make broth, I think. I've often watched Kathie do it; she used to make it for Clive."

"And not for you?"

"No, Clive is delicate you know, and needs strengthening things," replied Syd sedately, as he seated himself on a large stone to watch the doctor, trying in vain to blow the moist, green vaal-bush sticks into a blaze.

"Do you always use this kind of wood here?" he asked presently, rising half blinded by smoke.

"Always," said Syd cheerfully," "there's no other kind."

"Well, I must try and find some other kind," said Graham; and going into the tent he returned with a little three-legged stool, which was the only furniture besides the cupboard, and a rough huge box that the tent contained, and chopping it up, proceeded to build a fire with the pieces.

"There," he exclaimed, as it glowed and crackled merrily, "you see I am independent of your smoky, sulky vaal-bush."

"So could we be if we liked to chop up the chairs," said Syd, laughing.

"Well, if I lived here I should soon chop them up."

"And when they were all burned?"

"Then I should chop up the tables."

"And then?"

"Then the tent pegs and poles, and by that time I should have had enough of Hebron, and should go somewhere else."

Sydney mentally decided that the doctor was a "very jolly fellow," and threw himself heartily into the work of helping him to get the dinner ready. He set out on the box, which Mr. Wood used for a table, the cracked plates, some knives and forks standing very much in need of cleaning, and then, after a good deal of searching, he found two iron cups and a battered old coffee pot, which latter looked as if it had not been used for a good while.

"Do you think that is the best coffee-pot Mr. Wood possesses?" asked Graham rather ruefully, when Syd carried it to him in triumph.

"I guess it's the only one," laughed the boy, who had picked up a good many Yankeeisms from Chips.

Mr. Wood was still asleep when the impromptu meal, which it had taken some time to prepare, was ready, and Graham would not wake him.

"Who says we are not good cooks?" he demanded, when he carried in the broiled chops, and Syd followed with the coffee. "I defy anyone to show me better chops."

"Or better coffee," said Sydney, placing it on the box.

"I am not so sure about the coffee. I have an idea that it will have a very strong flavour of rust, haven't you? But what are you doing? You are not going yet; you must stay and dine with me."

"Oh, no thank you," he replied, hastily putting on his hat. "I had dinner long ago, and Kathie will be wondering what has become of me."

"She must wonder a little longer then. No, I will not let you go off like that; I am not going to dine all alone. Put down your hat; I will not let you go."

Few people could resist Dr. Keith's persuasive tone, and Sydney was no exception, so he obediently laid down his hat. He had declined at first only because he feared that the doctor guessed how very frugal had been his dinner; but now that he was convinced that he really desired his company, Syd's carefully trained ideas of politeness would not permit him to go away and leave him alone, so he sat down opposite Graham, and thoroughly enjoyed the white bread and butter and well-cooked chops, and even the coffee out of the rusty old pot.

He had scarcely more than commenced, however, when he thought of Clive—poor Clive! who had dined as frugally as he, and who had even less appetite for the brown bread and weak tea. Syd's eyes filled with tears and he laid down his knife and fork, and nothing Graham could say would induce him to touch another morsel. At last Graham gave up the attempt, and drew him to talk of his home, learning in the course of the conversation that "Kathie always taught him and Clive," that "Pearl loved music and sang beautifully," that Towser Chips had taught him to swim, and that Ambie Hildyard had taught him and Clive to ride, &c., &c.

"You are very fond of Ambie Hildyard, are you not?" said Graham artfully.

The boy replied enthusiastically in the affirmative. Ambie was his hero and ideal of all that was manly, brave, and handsome, and his face glowed as he sounded the praises of his friend.

"I suppose he comes here very often?"

"He used to come pretty often when he lived in Kimberley, but he is in Johannesburg now, and we haven't seen him for months."

There was another question which Graham longed to ask, but he told himself it would be mean to try to find out what he wished to know from a child. He doubted, too, whether Sydney would have told him, for he had noticed, with secret admiration of the boy's good taste, that though he talked freely enough of himself and Clive, their studies, games, &c., he carefully abstained from saying anything which would make the stranger acquainted with the inner domestic economy of his home.

"I am glad you and I have met, Sydney," he said, shaking the boy's hand at parting. "I suspect I shall have to spend the next week or two in Hebron. You must come and see me often while I am here."

Syd cheerfully promised and started homewards, feeling that he had had an adventure.

The rest of the short, dark afternoon, Graham spent pacing up and down in front of the tent, glancing in every now and then to see if his cousin still slept. It was nearly dark when at last he awoke.

"So it was not a dream after all," he said, as Graham came at once to his side; "it is really you."

"It really is. Do you know that you have slept the whole afternoon away? and now I am going to bring you some dinner."

"Dinner," repeated he with a rather embarrassed laugh, "I don't know where you'll get it, Graham. I am afraid you will find my cupboard rather in the condition of Mother Hubbard's."

Assuring him that the dinner was forthcoming, Graham, went out and returned with the coffee, which he had been keeping hot by the fire, and before long he carried to his cousin's bedside a meal arranged with as much care and daintiness as, under the circumstances, was possible. Leslie

Keith's thin face flushed, and a half-bitter, half-softened look came into his eyes.

"I never expected this," he said. "I did not think that I should ever depend for a meal upon any one's charity."

"There can be no talk of 'charity' between you and me, Leslie," said Graham, in a pained voice. "And how could you suffer things to come to such a pass without letting me know, and I only thirty miles away?"

"I could not stoop to ask alms, even from you," answered Leslie proudly; "and I deserved nothing better than to die of starvation."

"And your mother, I suppose, deserved nothing better than to hear months afterwards from strangers that her son had died such a death hundreds of miles away?"

"She would not have been likely to hear of it; and she has Dora."

"And what has Dora?"

"She has her husband's money and the tender memory of his love and devotion to carry with her through life," he said, in the old, sullen, resentful tone; "that ought to be enough for her."

"I did not think you were capable of such a mean, ungenerous speech," said Graham hotly. But," he added, in a different tone, "I suppose Dora deserves it; in the first place for falling in love with a hot-headed firebrand like you, and in the second for marrying a scamp out of pique, and to please Colonel Keith."

Leslie did not reply and Graham, after some difficulty, succeeded in persuading him to eat some of the dinner, which was growing cold, and to go to sleep again.

"And we leave Hebron to-morrow, and five weeks hence, if all goes well, you will be in England once more."

The speaker was Graham Keith; he and his cousin were sitting together at supper in the latter's tent. Three weeks had passed since that blustering morning when Kathie had called Graham to his assistance, and in that time Graham had succeeded in convincing him that it was his duty to return to England, and take up his medical studies where he had left them off five years before. For the first week Leslie had been very ill—so ill that Graham had feared that, after all, he had come too late to do more than see him die; but after a while Graham's care and skill triumphed, and he recovered. It had been very hard to

persuade him that, in duty to his mother and himself, he ought to return home, but at last Graham's arguments, and the warm heart and good sense which he really possessed, underlying all his recklessness and fiery pride, prevailed, and he consented to go.

"Yes," he said, in answer to Graham's remark, "I can scarcely believe that in such a short time I shall be at home again. My mother will find it hard to forgive me for all that I have made her suffer."

"Never fear but she will forgive you. I can fancy what a welcome the prodigal will receive."

Leslie smiled half sadly. "Yes, I know she will forgive me," he said. "But I'll never forgive myself. Oh, Graham, how can I ever thank you?"

"Now, Leslie," interrupted Graham, in an expostulating tone, "we have gone over that subject so often lately. To what better use could I put those few hundreds that are lying idle? You have nothing to thank me for, Leslie, nothing."

"Have I not? When you have shown me more clearly than I ever saw it before what a fool and villain I have been in abandoning my mother, and skulking about under an assumed name; when you have saved me from dying of starvation, a wretched, broken-down——" He paused, overcome by emotion, but recovering himself quickly, he added, "And yet, Graham, I must have lost some of my independence or I could never have accepted your generous kindness."

"You have lost some of your false pride, and foolishness, perhaps," Graham told him; "and for my part I think it was high time. Look at the matter from a sensible point of view, and accept my kindness, as you are pleased to call it, as I should accept yours were our circumstances reversed."

"I wish you were coming home too," said Leslie presently.

Graham shook his head. "I do not wish to go back yet. I doubt if I shall ever go back to stay."

"And what are you going to do? Stay in Kimberley?"

"For a month or two, and then I think I shall go to Johannesburg. I don't care much where I go, so long as I have plenty of work to do."

This was said so sadly that his companion looked up in surprise.

"I mean," he added, catching the look, "I can make myself contented anywhere. I shall go back to England some time when you are a flourishing M.D., and are making your mother and Dora so happy that they will have forgotten all your years of absence."

The next day they left Hebron, and a week later Leslie Keith sailed for England. Graham felt a trifle envious and a trifle dreary as he turned back to his hotel, after having watched the steamer which bore his cousin away till it ceased to be even a black speck on the uneasy waste of waters; envious because life held so much for Leslie, dreary because for himself it seemed to hold so little—nothing, so far as he could see, but a dreary round of duty.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

EVERYTHING comes to an end in time, and though Kathie and Pearl Milner had been tempted to think that weary winter would never draw to a close, it had at last given place to a hot, unhealthy spring. All day long the sun beat fiercely down, the hot, dust-laden wind blew from morning till night, and people longed in vain for the sudden, violent thunderstorms of the spring before, which, if they had caused discomfort, brought at least health and refreshment.

"What is Syd coming up the hill at such a pace for?" asked Pearl, looking out in the direction of the road one afternoon as she and Kathie stood ironing in the kitchen, where the thermometer, if there had been one, would have registered considerably over a hundred degrees of heat.

"He ought not to run in this heat," said Kathie anxiously. "It is not good for him, and he complained of headache this morning. Where have you been, Syd?" she asked, as, breathless and panting, the boy came in and threw himself down on the floor.

"Down to the river. Oh, Kathie, the river has come down."

"The river has done what?"

"Come down. I wish you could have seen it; it came down like a great red wall. It has been raining every day up country they say, and all the streams and spruits are full. The river is roaring like a sea; just listen to it."

"Oh, I am sorry!" exclaimed Kathie. "When can we expect to see papa again?" Mr. Milner had crossed the river several days before to dig on a kopje where some one was reported to have found good diamonds.

"Not for a good while, I think," said Syd. "The pont will be useless for weeks, I heard some one say, and it will be several days before the boats can work."

"I am so sorry," said Kathie again. "I wish papa had not gone. But what have you got there, Syd?"

"A note for you," he answered, tossing it to her. "Mrs. Bain gave it to me."

Kathie opened and read it, and Pearl, who was watching her, saw by the flush that rose to her face, and the slight, proud erecting of her head, that Mrs. Bain's communication, whatever it might be, was by no means pleasing.

"Well, what is it?" she asked, as Kathie dropped the note on to the table.

"A request from Mrs. Bain that I will embroider her two mantel covers 'exactly like those I made for Miss Bernhardt'; she says that she will give me two pounds each for them."

"What does she mean?" almost gasped Pearl, the passionate colour rushing to her face. "Does she think you are a seamstress? How dare she insult us, the ill-mannered, insolent woman?"

"She does not mean it as an insult, Pearl; it is only her way."

"Only her way of insulting you—yes. Do you suppose that she would write you such a note if you were living at Beechwood?"

"Certainly not; but we are not living at Beechwood. Mrs. Bain guesses, or rather she knows—everybody does—that we are very short of money, and she tells me how I can earn a little; she means it kindly, I believe. She might have put it differently, to be sure; but she is naturally coarse-minded and wanting in delicacy, and doubtless she never dreams that she has said anything to hurt me."

"If she does not know better she ought to be taught," said Pearl hotly, "and I would teach her if I had my way."

"What would you have me do?"

"Do! Why tear her insolent note into pieces, and tell her you are a lady, and not a seamstress."

"Now, Pearl, you are absurd. Can I not be a lady and still embroider a drape for Mrs. Bain?"

"Of course you can; I am not so silly. But when she orders you in such a fashion, it is intolerable."

"I wish you would, Kathie," said Sydney, his cheeks almost as red as Pearl's with indignation. "Tear it up and send it back to her. I will take it at once—now."

"No, no," said Kathie soothingly; "if Mrs. Bain is rude, why should I be like her? I shall certainly not send her note back."

"What shall you do then?"

"I think I shall do it for her."

"Kathie, you don't mean that you are going to sew for Mrs. Bain, and take money from her!"

"I certainly shall not sew for her for nothing," said Kathie coolly.

"Kathie Milner, have you no pride left?" Pearl's tone was tragic.

"I have plenty," said Kathie. "Too much, or I should not even have felt a passing annoyance. Yes, Pearl, I will do the work and take the money. I have been wishing for a long time that we were able to buy the cod-liver oil and tonic that Barkly doctor said Clive ought to have, and if I do this we shall be able to get them for him. His health is of more importance than our pride. Confess now that you know it is."

"Well," said Pearl reluctantly, "I suppose it is, but I'd just as soon be dead as have to endure insults and humiliations at every turn, just because we can't afford to resent them." And poor, proud Pearl went doggedly on with her work.

"Please don't do it, Kathie," begged Syd. "If you do she will think——"

"What will she think?"

"She will think you are used to have people treat you so—that you don't think anything of it—oh, I can't express what I mean, but——"

"I think I know what you mean, Syd dear, but it matters very little what she thinks; and you need not fear that I shall do anything that a lady should not."

"I know you won't, Kathie; but I can't bear to have you treated so."

"I do not like it either, Sydney, but we must not let our pride get the better of our good sense; and let us never forget that 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'"

"I will try to remember," said Syd, his bright face softening.

"That's right, dear; I know you will. But, Sydney, what is the matter with you? Your head is hot and your hands are burning. Are you ill?

"No, I don't think I am ill, but my head has ached all day, and now I feel queer and shaky; I think I'll go and lie down."

"Does he not look strange?" said Kathie as he left the room. "I hope he is not going to be ill."

"Yes, he does look queer. Oh, Kathie, you don't think he is going to have the fever."

"I don't know; I hope not; but he looks ill, and there have been several cases of fever in the camp lately. I hope he will be better in the morning."

But Kathie's hopes were not destined to be realised; the morning found Syd with scarlet cheeks, hands of fire, and eyes burning with unnatural brilliancy; even her inexperienced eyes saw that it was without doubt the fever she so dreaded. Her heart sank, and she shrank with a shivering dread from this new trouble, so unexpected, so hard to bear—Sydney to be seriously ill and to have to lie in that miserable tent through which the sun burned fiercely all day, without medicine, without proper food, and with no better or more experienced nursing than she and Pearl could give him. It was too terrible, too hard to bear. No wonder that poor Kathie's wearied, much-tried spirit felt that it was altogether impossible to bear up under this the hardest trial of all.

"It needed only this," said Pearl, dropping into a seat and covering her face despairingly with her hands. "Oh, Kathie, what shall we do?"

"I don't know; but, Pearl, it will do no good to give way like that, and we may be alarming ourselves unnecessarily. It *may* not be the fever after all, and he *may* get better as the day grows cooler."

"No, he will not," returned Pearl, with passionate bitterness. "The worst that can happen always happens to us. It is that terrible typhoid fever I am sure, and what strength has he to fight against it, living as he has all the winter?"

The same question was in Kathie's own mind, and she had found no answer to it. If Syd were really seized with serious illness—and she had little doubt that he was—what

hope could there be of his recovery, weakened as was his constitution by months of exposure and privation. Bitter, hopeless tears rose to her eyes, but she would not suffer them to go any further, and resolutely set herself to perform all the hundred and one household tasks which must always be done, and all the more regularly when sickness or trouble comes to render them tenfold harder and more irksome.

The boy lay awake all through the day with a raging headache, and trying vainly to shade his tortured eyes from the hot, yellow glare which poured down through the canvas. He turned away with a shudder from the sour bread and smoke-flavoured tea which was all the dinner poor Kathie could take him. When the sun went down, and the night, always cool and fresh on those breezy heights, came, he fell into a heavy sleep. Kathie and Pearl were far too uneasy to go to bed. Pearl sat at the door of Syd's tent leaning her head wearily against the pole, while Kathie paced up and down the moonlit space in front of the door, listening to the deep, hoarse roar of the swollen river, which seemed to her excited fancy to be full of sorrowful warning, and to be bent on making them understand how completely it separated them from their father when they longed so for his presence.

The next day Syd was delirious, and looked at them with unrecognising eyes. At one time he would repeat verses of poetry and lessons which he had learned weeks before; at another he would sing in his high, clear voice snatches of his favourite songs or hymns, or—hardest of all to be borne by those who watched over him in such yearning sorrow and pain—he would moan and cry out in an agony of burning thirst which could not be quenched.

"Oh, if papa would only come!" cried Pearl for the hundredth time. "If only there was a doctor here! Kathie, he will die if he has to lie here day after day in this way."

Kathie knew it; but what could she do. No medical man lived nearer than Barkly, and whom had they to send for him? No one came near their tents all that day; for, since the Bernhardts and Chips had left Hebron, it was very seldom that any one visited them. Almost the only one was Mrs. Hout, who, whenever business or pleasure took her to Hebron, never failed to toil up the long, stony hill to see the two girls whose loneliness she pitied most

sincerely. How often during that day Kathie's thoughts turned to her, so kindly, so helpful, so experienced. But of what use was it to think of her? The great angry river separated them from her, as from all other chances of help.

Night came again, increasing their feeling of loneliness. They could not think of sleeping, but sat together by the sick boy's bed, listening to the eerie night winds rustling the vaal-bushes, and the loud rushing of the river, which, except for the far-away barking of the dogs at the Korana location, were the only sounds which broke the heavy silence. The moon was not shining brightly as on the previous night, great, black clouds obscured her, and covered the heavens as with a pall, seeming to cut off the hill on which their tents stood from all communication with the rest of the world. Utterly alone in their great sorrow and fear, they sat, while the hours seemed to move on more slowly than they had ever known them do before. Clive kneeling on the floor, his head on Kathie's lap, slept peacefully. He had positively refused to go and lie down in his sister's tent; and as long as he was awake would not be sent out of sight of Sydney. Kathie and Pearl had told each other that he ought to be sent away out of danger of infection; but where were they to send him? There were many of the diggers, doubtless, who would have received him kindly and cared for him, but not one with whom they would have trusted him. They felt that after all he was safer at home, where the first symptom of indisposition would be detected; and it was as well that they decided as they did, for Clive would certainly have refused to be sent away. Passionately attached to his brother, and never absent from him when well, it would have been a hard task to induce him to leave him now. All the evening he had sat at the foot of the bed, his eyes never quitting Syd's face. He did not cry or sob, as most children would have done, but sat still, and motionless as a statue, in an agony of deep, silent grief, very rare and very hard to witness in a child of his age. A little before midnight he fell asleep, greatly to the relief of Kathie, whose own grief was doubled by the sight of his anguish, and the thought of how lonely and gloomy his life would be without his brother, his second self.

The lonely, silent night wore away, and Kathie scarcely knew whether it was most relief or most pain when the dawn broke at last. The long, dark night was past, and the hot, dusty day had come to take its place. How was

it to be lived through? Sydney was much the same as on the day before, only that the fever ran higher, and the intervals of sleep, when they came, were more painfully like heavy unconsciousness.

"This must not go on," said Kathie. "I must go into the town and get some one to cross the river and take a message to papa. Perhaps he could go to Barkly and bring the doctor, and even if he cannot, he must know how ill Syd is; he would never forgive us if we made no effort to send for him, and ——" She did not finish the sentence, and the words that were left unsaid sank heavy on their hearts.

"But, Kathie, who can you get? Who will venture to cross the river raging as it is like a sea?"

"I don't know. I am afraid no one will go, but I must try. Some of those Koranas and Griquas are good oarsmen, perhaps one of them could be induced to try. Oh, if Towser Chips were but here! He has rowed safely across when no one else would venture. I wonder if I could ——"

But here Pearl interrupted her in alarm.

"No, Kathie, you know you could not. Of what use would your fair-weather rowing be? I will not let you go until you promise that you will not dare to risk your life in such a fashion; it would be wicked, and it would be useless. Have you ever seen the river full?"

"No; but you need not be afraid, Pearl, I shall do nothing so foolish as that would be."

Kathie *had* never before seen the river full, and in spite of all she had been told of its swiftness and fury, she was amazed and startled when she reached the bank at the sight of the heaving sea of reddish, yellow water. The river was covered with angry, turbulent waves, and looked more cruel and fierce than she had dreamed the placid, sunny stream could look. It dashed high up among the rocks and bushes on the opposite side, and the old willow-tree below the pont, under which she and Lena had often read and worked in past days, stood far out in the water, all but its topmost branches quite submerged. Who would venture to row over that perilous space?

Standing on the bank a little distance off were several natives, and among them a stalwart Kafir whom Kathie recognised as a man who had once worked in her father's claim. He had come from East London, and had been accustomed to row across the Buffalo at all hours of the day

and night, in all winds and weathers. He was an expert swimmer too, and Kathie felt that if any one could help her it was he. She went at once to him and made her request, not without a feeling of shame that she was urging him to undertake a difficult and dangerous task. The man listened and shook his head.

"Look at it, inkoskasana," he said, pointing to the rolling water. "It's worse than the big sea, more angry, I couldn't do it."

"I would not ask you," said Kathie, "only my little brother is very ill, and I must send word to my father. I know if any man in Hebron can row across the river, you can."

The Kafir looked pleased at the compliment, but still shook his head doubtfully.

"Who would lend me a boat?" he asked. "It would be washed down in a minute and broken to pieces."

"If you are not afraid," said Kathie, "I will ask Mr. Worth for his boat; he will not be afraid to lend it to you."

"I am not afraid, I can swim; but what will the inkoskasana give me if I go?"

Kathie was taken aback for a moment; but remembering that she was not without the means of bribing him, she held up the little gold watch which she always wore, and which Gerald had given her years before, and said:

"If you will go and take this note to my father I will give you this." She would have thought once that it would be impossible to part with this one little relic of her lost brother, and to a Kafir; but now every feeling was swallowed up in intense anxiety for Sydney and longing for her father's presence.

The native's black eyes sparkled at the sight of the offered reward, and after a moment's hesitation and another glance at the turbid stream, he said shortly, "Lungile, I'll go;" and without waiting for more he ran up the bank to request the loan of a boat.

In a few minutes he returned, and wasting no time—perhaps he feared that his courage would cool if he did so—he threw off his jacket, hat, and boots, and unfastening the boat took his place in her and started on his hazardous voyage.

Shuddering as she looked, but not daring to remove her eyes for an instant, Kathie watched him, expecting every moment to see the boat swamped or overturned. Rowing

was of little use, and the courageous Kafir only used his oar to turn aside or guide the boat safely past the logs of wood, great branches of trees, and heavy masses of débris, which instantly threatened it with destruction. Once fully in the current the boat seemed to fly along at fearful speed, borne down by the mighty, irresistible flood, far below the point from which it had started; but steadily, though almost imperceptibly, it neared the opposite side. Twenty times during the perilous passage Kathie wished she had not persuaded him to undertake a task so fraught with danger. But at last the bank was reached, the Kafir sprang out, and after drawing the boat up out of the reach of the water, sped away in the direction of the kopje where she had told him he would find her father. She drew a long breath of thankfulness and relief, and breathed a prayer that the return passage might be as quickly and safely accomplished. It seemed a long time to her impatience, though in reality little more than half an hour, before the man reappeared on the bank—alone. Kathie's heart sank like lead, and there was time for a thousand torturing fears and anxious conjectures as to the reason of her father's non-appearance. Was he ill and unable to come? Had he met with an accident? Only a very strong reason would keep him away, she knew, and in an agony of suspense she watched the boat as it raced once more over the yellow flood. It was not long before it reached the bank, and the man sprang ashore amid the cheers of the natives, who had watched with much admiration the brave and successful feat performed by the "Colony Kafir." Leaving them to secure the boat he hurried up to where Kathie stood waiting, and handed her a note—the one she had given him; and, scrawled on the back in pencil by one of the diggers to whom the man had taken it, when on reaching Mr. Milner's claim he had found him absent, were the words, "Mr. Milner left here this morning for Kimberley in Peter Fraser's mule-cart."

Kathie read it through slowly, seeming scarcely able to grasp the meaning of the words. The Kafir watched her in silence for a minute or two, then signified that he was waiting for the promised reward. She gave it to him and thanked him, hardly knowing what she said. He walked away, followed by his admirers, and Kathie was left to herself. Crumpling up the note in her hand she began her homeward walk, unconscious that a very interested pair of eyes were watching her from the bank above.

Graham Keith had come to the river's edge just as the Kafir started to row across it. He watched with astonishment the daring feat, wondering what could have induced the man to attempt it; but he had not dreamed of associating it with Kathie, who sat so quietly on the bank until the man returned and gave her the note, and he heard her exclamation of surprise and disappointment. What could be the matter, he wondered. Something very serious it must be, or surely Kathie would not ask even so skilled and brave an oarsman to risk so much in order to send a message across the river. "I must ask her," he said to himself. "Perhaps I can help her;" and, without waiting to reflect that his question would most probably be regarded as an impertinence and coldly and briefly replied to, he hastened after her.

"Miss Milner," he began, "pardon me; but I fear something is the matter. Can I assist you in any way?"

Kathie forgot everything but that here was the doctor they needed so much. With a flush of joy that startled Graham and made his heart beat fast, she said, holding out her hand in the old, impulsive fashion he remembered so well,

"Oh, Dr. Keith! I am so glad——" She did not finish the sentence, and before he had time to take her hand she had dropped it again, recalled to herself by something in the expression of his eyes. "I beg your pardon—I——" She paused again, not knowing what to say, and crimsoning with angry embarrassment.

"I am afraid you are in trouble," he said gently, pitying, though, to tell the truth, rather enjoying, her confusion. "Mr. Milner is not ill, I hope."

"No," replied she, her cold, stiff tone and manner contrasting strangely with the eagerness of the moment before, "my father was well when I saw him last; but my brother is ill, I fear dangerously."

"Not my little friend Sydney! What is the matter with him?"

"I believe he has taken the fever; there have been several cases of it here."

"Typhoid fever!" exclaimed Graham, rather incredulously. "I know there have been a few cases in the town; but I should have thought that you were safe from fever on the breezy hill where you are camped. Have you had any advice for him?"

"No," replied Kathie, in a low tone, "we have not been able to send to Barkly yet."

"Then until you can send for the Barkley physician will you permit me, Miss Milner? If he has the fever he should have immediate attention."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad," Kathie answered, feeling that Pearl was right, and that nothing but humiliations was to be their portion henceforth, and it seemed to her that the climax of all humiliations had come now that she had to accept a kindness from Graham Keith. But there was no alternative, for Sydney's sake she dared not refuse, and in spite of all, and underlying the unwillingness and annoyance, was a feeling of relief that it was Graham, and not a stranger — in Graham's gentle, skilful hands she knew she might safely trust her darling boy.

Pearl was at the door of the tent anxiously watching for Kathie; and her surprise was only equalled by her joy when she saw that her companion was Dr. Keith. In answer to her eager "Where is papa?" Kathie handed her the note which the Kafir had brought back.

That he was not prepared to find Sydney so ill was evident from the very grave expression of his face as he bent over him.

"It is typhoid fever," he said. "How long has he been delirious?"

"Since yesterday morning. Oh, Dr. Keith, do not say that he will die!"

It was Pearl's voice that uttered the passionate cry, and she burst into a flood of uncontrollable tears.

"I did not say that he would die," said Graham pityingly, following her as she hurried out lest the passionate sobs she could not restrain should disturb Syd. "You must not give up hope at once, I do not think the case is hopeless by any means. Are you quite alone here?"

"Quite; papa has gone to Kimberley."

"And have you no friend who would come and stay with you? Excuse me, but you ought to not be here alone."

"There is no one who would come; the only friend we have lives near Warrenton, and she could not cross the river even if she knew, and she does not."

"Is that Miss Bernhardt?" he asked; he had heard Mrs. Roberts speak of Miss Bernhardt as 'Miss Milner's dearest friend.'

"Oh, no," replied Pearl, "Miss Bernhardt married and left Hebron months ago; she is in Europe now. I was

thinking of Mrs. Hout, who I am sure would come to us if she knew, and if it were possible for her to cross the river. But it is not possible," she added hopelessly.

"Could we not send a message to your father? If you will write I know a man who will go instantly if I ask him."

"You are very good," she answered gratefully, "but it would be useless. We do not know in what part of Kimberley papa will be staying, nor how long he intends to remain. By the time the messenger got there he might be on his way home."

"Then we must do the best we can," said Graham. "Perhaps he will return to-morrow. I will go back now and bring some medecine for Sydney."

He returned in a very little while with the medicine, and after administering the first dose he went away again, and Kathie and Pearl settled down to another lonely night of watching—not quite so lonely though, or so hopeless, as had been the night before.

"We must not both sit up to-night, Pearl," said Kathie. "We shall be good for nothing in a little while if we do not take some rest. You must go and lie down now, and I will call you if he gets worse."

"I don't want to go, I am not the least bit sleepy," Pearl replied, without moving.

"You will feel sleepy the moment you shut your eyes, and we shall be unfit to take care of Syd if we try to do without rest altogether. Go, Pearl."

"Very well," said Pearl, rising reluctantly, "I will go if you promise to call me in an hour and go and rest yourself."

Kathie gave the promise and Pearl went away. After she was gone Kathie lit a candle, and placing it where the light would not shine into Sydney's eyes, she opened her little Bible and began to read the divine words, the help and comfort of which she so sorely needed. Slowly she turned over the leaves, reading and dwelling upon the promises. She read on for a long while, gathering something of hope and strength as she went. Just as she was closing the book she heard a step on the gravel outside—quick, yet soft—and Graham entered.

"How is he?" he whispered.

"Just the same; he has not moved since you left him."

He took up the candle, and going to the boy's bedside bent over him. He was lying in a heavy sleep, or rather stupor;

his face, from which the fever-flush had faded, was white as if chiselled out of marble—motionless, death-like. Graham's face grew so grave, as he stood holding his wrist to count the faint pulsations, that Kathie thought she read her boy's doom in it.

"Is there no hope? Oh, Graham, do not say that he will die!" she cried despairingly, unconsciously, in her anguish and fear, using the name by which she always thought of him, and which came more naturally than the formal "Dr. Keith," and never dreaming how the old familiar name—even though he guessed that it was uttered unconsciously—thrilled through his heart.

"I think we may hope," he said. "It would be foolish and wrong to give way to despair at once."

"Have you ever known any one so ill as he is recover?"

"Yes, often," he answered, thankful that he was able to reply decidedly in the affirmative. "You must not be hopeless about him, Miss Milner, he is in God's hands you know, and I will do my best for him; you trust me, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, entirely; and I thank you a thousand times for coming to our aid."

"You have nothing to thank me for, but you may trust me to do my best, my very utmost, for him. With God's help, I hope and believe we shall pull him through; and now you will go and rest, will you not? I am going to stay with Sydney until morning. No, you must not refuse to go," as she shook her head. "If you wear yourself out with watching now, what can you do when he recovers consciousness, and needs you much more than he does at present?"

"You are very kind," murmured Kathie, "but Pearl is coming to take my place presently. You must not stay, Dr. Keith, it is not necessary, and—and we cannot ask so much of you."

"You have not asked it," he said, smiling a little, "but whether you go or not I intend to stay with him to watch the effect of the medicine I administered this evening. I may have to change it. I wish you would go," he added, "for Sydney's sake. You will be able to do so much more for him by-and-by, when he really needs you, if you take proper rest now." And so, finding all her objections overruled, and feeling that it would be wrong as well as ungracious to persist in her refusal, she went.

Graham sat down in the chair she had just vacated, and

took up the little Bible which still lay where she had left it. On the fly-leaf was written in a small, beautiful hand, "Kathie, with Lena's love," and beneath that, "Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee," below that, "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," and then in tiny, printed characters:

"Leaning on Thee, Jesus, my Guide and Friend, my gracious Saviour
I am blest,
Though weary, Thou dost condescend to be my rest.
Leaning on Thee with childlike faith, to Thee the future I confide,
Each step of life's untrodden way Thy love shall guide."

Turning over the leaves he saw that the little book had evidently been much read, and that many passages were marked and many verses underlined, and he wondered whether Lena had marked them or Kathie herself. The verse, "Cast thy burden on the Lord," was doubly underlined.

"Poor Kathie!" he said pityingly; "her burden is heavy enough just now. Does she know where to look for help and comfort I wonder. I hope so, and somehow I think she has learned; God grant that it may be so."

Several hours passed, and it was past midnight when Syd opened his eyes and fixed them wonderingly and a little startled upon the doctor's face. The wild, wandering look had left them, and Graham saw that he was recognised.

"How do you feel now, Sydney?" he asked, taking his hand. "You have not forgotten me, have you?"

"No; you are Dr. Keith. But why are you here? I feel very strange. Have I been ill?"

"Yes, very ill; but you are going to be better now, I hope. Drink this, and do not talk any more."

Sydney obediently swallowed the draught.

"Is it night?" he asked presently.

"Yes, the middle of the night, or rather early morning; it is nearly two o'clock."

"Are Kathie and Pearl asleep?"

"I hope so; they have gone to bed."

"Oh, dear!" said the boy, in his faint, weak voice, and with a deep sigh. "Why had I to go and get sick? They had enough to bother them without that."

"Do not let that trouble you now, my boy," said Graham kindly. "It is not your fault, and you will be well again soon, I trust. I am going to stay here and take care

of you, and of Kathie and Pearl too if they will let me; and now Sydney——" He did not finish the sentence, for the boy's beautiful dark eyes had closed, and he had relapsed into unconsciousness again.

Graham sat by his side until the dawn began to break, and he heard Kathie and Pearl stirring in their tent. Then he rose, and went out into the little kitchen and made a fire, with considerable difficulty managing to fan the vaal-bush roots into a sulky blaze, and thinking of the day when Syd had helped him to make a fire of Leslie Keith's camp-stool. He wished he had a stool to chop up now, but there was not one. He peeped into the dining-room; there was a chair there in so battered and shaky a condition that he was quite sure no one would ever venture to sit down on it; but it would be taking rather too great a liberty to burn it, so he went back and patiently fanned the obstinate fire until the water boiled. Then he found some coffee, made it, and placed the kettle near the fire to keep hot until Kathie should come out; and after taking another look at Sydney, who lay exactly as he had left him, he went away.

A few minutes afterwards Kathie entered the kitchen. She paused on the threshold in surprise at the unexpected sight of the fire, and the coffee-cups standing ready. For a moment she wondered who had been busy there; the next she remembered Graham, and knew that it must have been he. How very thoughtful of him, and how like his old self. But Kathie could have wished he were not so kind, for every fresh act of kindness added to the weight of the obligation under which she already felt towards him. To feel under an obligation to any one was never pleasant to Kathie, and to be under an obligation, even a slight one, to Graham Keith was very, very unpleasant.

She poured out a cup of coffee and carried it to Sydney's tent, but the doctor was not there, and glancing out of the door she saw him just disappearing over the kopje, which was beginning to redden in the glow of the rising sun.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

SEVERAL days passed slowly and heavily, days during which Sydney seemed to be drifting nearer and nearer to the land

of shadows, and farther from those who loved him. Every day, Kathie hoped, would bring her father home, but day after day went over and he did not come.

Kathie had written to Mr. De Beer telling him how ill Sydney was and how great was her anxiety, and requesting him to find out if possible where her father was staying and give him the letter which she had enclosed to him; but though she felt certain that the kind-hearted merchant would lose no time in doing as she implored him, she had received no answer to her letter, and Mr. Milner did not come, and her eyes were growing weary with hopeless watching.

"The fever will reach a crisis to-night," Graham said to her one day. "We shall know to-night whether——" he paused, but there was no need for him to finish the sentence. Kathie knew that a few hours would decide whether her boy was to live or die, and she knew that if her father did not come that day he would in all probability come too late to see Sydney alive; for she could see that Graham, though he never failed to speak cheerfully and encouragingly, was losing hope.

The hot, breathless day drew slowly to a close, and the grim King of Terrors seemed to be drawing nearer as each sorrow-weighted hour dragged itself away. Towards evening, as Kathie was sitting by the bedside trying to drink the cup of tea which Pearl had brought her, a shadow was thrown across the door, and a tall figure entered softly. The tent was almost dark, and at first Kathie did not know who her visitor was; the next moment she recognised Mrs. Hout.

"My poor child," she said, in a tone of deep pity as she bent down to kiss Kathie's pale cheek. "I did not hear of your trouble until to-day, when the doctor sent a Kafir to our place with a letter asking me to come to you. How is he now?"

Kathie dared not trust her voice to answer, and she went softly to the bedside, her kind, black eyes filling with tears as she looked down at the white, still face which she had always seen before so bright and full of sparkling merriment.

"My poor child," she said again, "I wish I had known before, I would have come to you if I had had to swim across the river. Have you been alone all the time?"

"Quite alone, except for the doctor."

"I am so glad that you have had him. I have heard a good deal about him from different people here, and they all

say he is so kind and clever. I think if any one can save the little boy, it is he."

Kathie did not answer; she felt that it was too late to talk of saving him. All that human love could suggest, all that human science could do, had been done; and now nothing remained but to await the result with what patience they might.

Presently Pearl came in, and a silent greeting passed between her and her old friend Then Graham entered and took up his station by the bed. Never as long as she lives will the recollection of that night's watch be effaced from Kathie's mind. Without was the calm, white beauty of the moonlight, within anguish, suspense, or rather a chill hopeless certainty settling down upon the hearts of all as the minutes passed.

Kathie sat at the head of the bed holding one of Syd's white, wasted hands; self-possessed and tearless she sat there, calm with the very intensity of her anguish, not praying, because she believed that her darling's soul was already far beyond the reach of her prayers. Graham stood beside her, his hand on the back of her chair, as silent and motionless, and, alas, almost as hopeless, as she. Mrs. Hout was on the other side of the bed, her dark, strongly-marked features hidden by her huge, black kapje, the tears streaming down her cheeks. Pearl knelt at the foot of the bed, one hand shading her eyes, the other clasped tight in both of Clive's, who stood beside her, his wide, wakeful eyes, that looked as if they would never close again, fixed on Syd's deathlike face.

The moon rose higher and poured a flood of silver light into the tent, the door of which was wide open to admit the faint breeze, and, piercing a torn place in the canvas, fell in a tremulous ring of silver on the sick boy's wavy hair. As the night wore on every sound died away, and an intense, oppressive silence reigned. Suddenly it was broken by a sound which made Kathie start and shiver as with a mortal cold, while Graham's hand involuntarily closed over hers, and Pearl trembled from head to foot and buried her face in her hands with a sob of agony, while Mrs. Hout, with a murmured "ach mijn Gott," slipped off her shoes and turned them upside down on the floor before her. The sudden sound which had so startled them was that which in all countries is associated with death and misfortune—the long-drawn, mournful howl of a dog. For a moment a

sickening, superstitious fear held them all spellbound, then Graham, recovering himself, went out and drove the creature away. But he had scarcely re-entered the tent when, returning to its former place, it uttered its melancholy, ominous howl again. Three times Graham drove it away, and each time it returned as if determined to make this night of watching as full of horror as possible.

Towards morning a change came over Sydney's face—imperceptible to the others, but what Graham had been waiting for. He bent over the pillow, intense anxiety written in every line of his face. Slowly, while he waited breathlessly, the boy's heavy lids lifted and the dark eyes looked into his. Graham raised him up and held a spoonful of liquid to his lips; he swallowed it, and then sank back heavily. Kathie looked at the doctor, her eyes asking the question her pale lips dared not utter.

"A change has come," he said, answering the silent question. "If he wakes conscious presently we may hope."

They settled down to watch once more, and it was not long before Syd's eyes opened again, and Graham drew a long breath of relief as he saw that the pained, wild look had left them. The boy did not speak, but looked from one to another of the silent group with curious intentness; then a tired look came over his face, and he fell back once more, and in a moment was asleep again. But it was a restful, refreshing sleep now, and altogether unlike the deathlike stupor in which he had lain for days past.

"The fever has left him," said Graham. "With care now he will live."

A heavy burden rolled off every heart, the oppressive weight was lifted. The dark night of despair was ended—the morning of hope had dawned.

The next day Mr. Milner returned. He had gone to Kimberley hoping to meet Ambie there. Months ago, when he had refused the offer of a loan of money which Ambie had made him, the young man had very diffidently offered him a sitaation in one of the houses of Hildyard and De Beer. Mr. Milner had declined that also; but now that he saw the impossibility of keeping the wolf from the door in Hebron he bethought himself of Ambie's offer, and determined to sacrifice his pride for the sake of his family and accept it. The river had been full, thus he had been prevented from acquainting his children with his intention. On reaching Kimberley he found that Ambie had not yet

arrived there. After waiting several days in the hope of seeing him, he went to Mr. De Beer's office intending to tell him the business that had taken him to town. He found that gentleman just returned to Kimberley after a fortnight's absence, and, when Mr. Milner entered the office, just in the act of reading Kathie's hurried note. Mr. Milner read his letter, and, forgetting everything but Syd's danger and the girls' loneliness, he dashed out of the office, hired a horse, and hurried home.

Sydney recovered as quickly as, considering how severe had been his illness, could be expected. Graham came to see him every day, read and talked to him, played for him on the piano, which had been carried into his tent, brought him books and fruit, and every day—after he grew stronger—took him for a long drive in the little, one-seated carriage, which he had sent for from Kimberley for the purpose. Mr. Milner, who would never have accepted anything for himself from a stranger, could not refuse what was so delicately and unostentatiously offered to Syd; and he and the doctor grew to be very good friends, conceiving a warm liking for each other, a little to Kathie's secret amusement and vexation. How very easily she could have made her father change his opinion of Graham Keith! For her own part she always contrived to be absent or too busy to see him when he came.

One afternoon, Graham, Syd, and Clive had just returned from a long drive to Mrs. Hout's, when Mr. Milner handed the former a letter which he had found in the post-office for him. It bore the Kimberley stamp, and was marked "urgent." Graham tore it open, wondering who the writer could be. It proved to be from Mrs. Langton, and was a request that he would come to "Stephie," who was dangerously ill and who particularly wished to see his old friend. Feeling very unwilling to leave Sydney before he was quite well, but knowing that he could do nothing but promptly obey the summons, Graham bade Mr. Milner, Pearl, and the boys good-bye—Kathie was out as usual—and hurried away. He did not intend, however, to go without bidding Kathie good-bye; she had not gone far, he knew, for he had seen her leave the tents a few minutes before he reached them. He found her, as he had expected, on the kopje. She was sitting on the ground, her hands clasped on a great rock in front of her, and her head resting on them. It was a weary attitude, and it was a very weary face which was lifed up at the sound of his approaching

footsteps. She rose slowly to her feet, guessing from his hurried step and the open letter in his hand that something had happened.

"I have come to wish you good-bye, Miss Milner," he said. "I am obliged to leave Hebron at once."

"You have heard no bad news, I hope," she said, glancing at the letter.

"Yes, Stephen Langton, an old friend of mine, is dangerously ill; his wife has written to ask me to go to him at once. I am sorry to go before Sydney is quite recovered, but I think he will do well now, and I shall send him some more medicine from Kimberley."

"Thank you; I trust you will find your friend better when you reach Kimberley; and—Dr. Keith, I have never thanked you yet—I do not know how to thank you for all your kindness to Syd. I feel that, under Heaven, he owes his life to you. I shall never forget it."

"You owe me no thanks," he said hurriedly, "I am more glad than I can say that I happened to be here when you needed me, but Syd owes his recovery as much, and more, to your devoted care as to my doctoring, which of itself would have been of little use."

"So would our nursing," Kathie told him. "If you had not come when you did, that would have availed but little I fear."

"I am very glad I happened to be here; it was absolutely essential that he should have advice at once. By-the-by, I have asked him to write to me occasionally when he is stronger; I would have asked your permission first, but you were not there; I trust you will permit him to do so."

"Certainly, if you wish it," she replied, resolving at the same time that Sydney's letters should be neither too frequent nor too confidential. It was very bad taste of Dr. Keith to desire to be intimate with any member of her family, she thought.

"Thank you," he said warmly, "I shall esteem it a favour and, as I am afraid that I forgot to give him my address, will you tell him, please, that any letters sent to the care of Captain Van Zyl at Johannesburg will find me?"

"Johannesburg?" repeated Kathie, fancying that he had made a mistake, "I beg your pardon, but I understood you to say that you were going to Kimberley?"

"I am to remain until my friend is better, but as soon as I can leave him I am going to Johannesburg. I was due there two weeks ago."

"And you delayed your journey on Sydney's account?" exclaimed Kathie involuntarily. "I am very sorry."

"No, do not be sorry about what makes me very glad. The inconvenience to myself has been very trifling, I assure you; and it is fortunate for my friend's sake that I am still here. I could not have obeyed his summons if I had been already in Johannesberg."

There was silence after that for a few minutes, while Graham watched Kathie's pale weary face from under the shadow of his hat, and her eyes wandered away to the distant hills. Then he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Miss Milner," he said; "I trust to see you looking better when next we meet; you have worn yourself to a shadow watching over Syd."

It was a hard matter for Graham to keep the yearning pity and tenderness he felt out of his voice, and he did not quite succeed. Kathie drew her hand away hastily from his lingering clasp, with a brief "Good-bye;" and the next moment he was gone. She watched him until he disappeared from view, and then she turned back to the little, lonely camp on the hill—lonelier than ever now.

CHAPTER XL.

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS DAY.

It was Christmas Eve; that day of all others when our thoughts will turn to the past, especially if the present is dark with trouble, and heavy with foreboding; and Kathie and Pearl Milner almost wished that, for this year at least, the Christmas time, with its memories and associations, could be effaced from the calendar. Last Christmas had not been a very bright one, but they had had Lena, and now, she was far away—spending her Christmas under the shadow of the Colisseum,—and they were quite alone. No more lonely than usual, to be sure, but at that season of the year, when families and friends long separated were meeting together to celebrate the glad Christmastide, when old feuds were forgotten, old estrangements bridged over, and when even over dreary Hebron there seemed to hang a hazy air of festivity and gladness, they could not but feel their utter loneliness and isolation more than at ordinary times. They had been busy all day exercising their best arts in cookery with the very poor and limited means at their command, so

that, in the matter of dinner at least, this Christmas might not be so very different from others. It was a very poor little best, after all, and when they had done their utmost they were sadly conscious that their Christmas dinner would be very unlike any one that they had ever sat down to in their lives before. Kathie's thoughts went back to Christmas at Beechwood Hall, where, in her childish days, she had in the housekeeper's room been initiated into the mysteries of roast turkey, plum pudding, mince pies, frosted cake, jellies, creams, &c.

"I never thought to live to wish for the roast beef and plum pudding we used to distribute to the poor people at Christmas time," she said to Pearl; "but I do, and for some of the nuts and rasins and bright-cheeked apples for the boys, too."

"I wish we had something to make a pudding with," said Pearl; "we could make one if we only had a few raisins. Oh, Kathie, did you ever think we'd come to this?" and the quick tears filled her eyes.

"I never thought you'd come to cry for a pudding," said Syd, laughing.

"Oh, it's not for the pudding," said she, turning hastily away.

"No," said Kathie, "it is not the want of the pudding that troubles us, but the other want of which it speaks so plainly. But never mind the pudding, Pearl; we have one little bit of Christmas," and she pointed to a basket of fruit and flowers which stood on the table, and which Mrs. Hout had sent them that morning.

"Yes, wasn't it good of Mrs. Hout? It made me feel that we were not quite alone in the world. Kathie, I wonder where Gerald is to-day?"

"I wonder. Poor Gerald! I hope he has not suffered as many privations as we have."

"I hope not; but is it not strange that we have never heard one word from him all these years. One would think his heart would turn to us at Christmas, if at no other time, and he would write or come to us."

"He does not know where we are, Pearl, or he would, I am sure—if he were alive, that is—he was always so loving and warmhearted, even as a boy; so different from other young fellows of his age. If he does not come, it is not because he has forgotten, or ceased to care for us, but because he cannot."

"Papa does not think that he is dead, Kathie."

"No, he does not. By the bye, has not papa returned yet?"

"Yes, he did come back, but he went away again to post a letter—the one he wrote to Ambie, you know—he forgot it this morning."

"Oh, I am sorry he has had to take that long walk again—he will be so tired. I hope he will come back soon. I am afraid we are going to have a storm."

"I don't think so," replied Pearl, glancing carelessly at the great masses of cloud that were banking themselves up against the western sky. "The storm seems to be going round towards Kimberley."

If Pearl had been more skilled in reading the signs of the weather, she would have known that those reddish coloured, strangely shaped clouds, and the sudden lull in the wind which had been blowing all day, meant mischief; but as it was she sat outside on a great rock near the door until it grew too dark to see, then she went in, lighted a candle, and sat down to the piano to play Christmas hymns and carols. Kathie busied herself in setting the table, and making the tea. When she had finished she went out to see if she could catch a glimpse of her father coming up the road, and she was startled at the appalling blackness of the sky, and the frequent flashes of lightning which every instant revealed the red line of the kopje, and the white road; but no sign of her father. She went in again feeling very uneasy at his absence, and somewhat alarmed at the prospect of one of those violent summer storms which she had long ago learned to dread.

The storm came on with more than ordinary violence, peal after peal of thunder shook the little room, and made the cups and saucers on the table rattle, while the blue, forked lightning flashed incessantly, and almost blinded them with its awful vivid brightness. The peals and flashes were at first unaccompanied by rain; but all at once it began to fall, when it was as if the flood gates of heaven had been suddenly opened and the water came down in sheets, and the sound of it and the hissing of the hailstones upon the iron, together with the wind which had risen again and was blowing furiously, were truly appalling. Louder howled the wind, brighter and more frequently flashed the lightning, heavier fell the hailstones, which were beginning to perforate the roof, and through the holes thus made the water

poured in streams. Kathie, Pearl, and the boys stood together in the middle of the floor, awed, and expectant, for all of them knew that the frail room could not much longer stand the terrible strain, and that, unless the fury of the storm abated very soon, it must be thrown over and broken to fragments, burying them in their ruins. Built of wood and iron, the little room was without a foundation, and on their return from the "rush," had not been made fast into the ground, but had been quickly put together, and a few large stones piled up at the corners to keep it firm.

The storm, instead of abating, increased in violence every moment. All at once a furious gust swept the room, and lifting it up bodily bore it forward several yards. There was a shock and a crack as it struck against a post, which providentially had been driven into the ground a few yards in front of it, and a cry of terror from every one as they were thrown violently to the ground. The light went out at the same moment, and they were in black darkness. For a few moments they lay still, half stunned by the fall, and momentarily expecting the roof to come crashing in upon them. Then Kathie, extricating herself from the mass of broken chairs, books, boxes, &c., which had fallen upon her, scrambled to her feet and felt about for the others. The vivid lightning every instant lit up the room, but, with the water streaming down her face, and the sharp, jagged hailstones beating into her eyes, she could see nothing.

"Pearl—Sydney—Clive, where are you?" she called, but in the raging noise her voice was lost; she could not even hear the sound of it herself. The suspense and fear she endured in those moments were almost maddening; she could not see either Pearl or the boys, while, of course, to hear their voices was impossible.

Presently a flash of lightning showed her that a sheet of iron had been torn from one of the walls, and also that her hands were covered with blood; but in the fear, excitement, and anxiety for the others she had scarcely even felt the pain of the cuts and scratches she had received, through falling on to the broken cups and saucers.

"Pearl, Pearl, where are you?" she cried wildly once more, but only the rattling peals of thunder and the roar of the rain and hail answered her, and she grew half frantic with terror. Had Pearl and the boys been killed or terribly injured, and was she alone unhurt? She crawled on her hands and knees across the floor, which was a foot deep in

ice-cold water, and presently her hand touched that of Clive, who was crouching in a corner. She flung her arms around him, half strangling him with her passionate embraces. "Oh, Clive, my darling, my dear boy. Are you safe—not hurt?"

"Yes—no; where have you been? I thought you were killed. I could not see nor hear you."

"I am safe; but Pearl and Sydney—I cannot see them."

"Oh, they are all right. I saw them just now when the last flash came. Oh, Kathie, let us get out of this room."

"Yes, we must as soon as we can, but are you sure Pearl and Syd are safe?"

"Quite sure; there they are, look!" and by the light of the next vivid flash she saw them standing together almost knee deep in a pool of mud and water, the hailstones beating down upon their bowed heads—drenched, dripping, shivering with cold, scratched, cut, and bruised, but alive, thank God! and comparatively unhurt. The fear and horror which had rendered Kathie powerless forsook her, and drawing Clive with her she made her way across the room to where they stood.

Pearl, who had been enduring agonies of anxiety on Kathie's account, flung her arms around her and Clive at once, exclaiming:

"Oh, Kathie, Kathie! Thank heaven you are safe! I thought we were all killed when the shock came."

"It is a miracle that we were not; if the house had moved a yard farther the roof would have fallen in; the rafters are cracked in every direction."

"What was it that stopped it?"

"The post in front, I think; but we must not stop here, the next gust of wind may bring the roof in upon us. We can get out through that hole in the wall."

"But where can we go? We cannot stand outside in this storm; the hailstones will cut us to pieces."

"They are doing that now, and we cannot stay here; that post may snap any minute; we shall be safer outside. And see," she exclaimed, as a blue flash lit up the outside world, showing them, besides the vast sheet of water which covered the ground, a little reed hut, partly covered with canvas, still standing. "The little hut the claim boys built; we can go there; if that falls upon us it will not hurt us."

With some difficulty they managed to squeeze through the opening in the wall, and wading through the water reached

the hut. The floor was ancle-deep in water, and the rain poured through the roof, but they drew a long breath of relief and thankfulness when they reached this frail, little haven of refuge. Here at least they were safe. But they had not reached it a moment too soon, for they had scarcely crawled in at the low, narrow doorway when, with a crash which they heard above the din of the storm, the roof of the room they had just left fell in. Awed and silent they drew together involuntarily and clasped each other's cold, trembling hands. How narrowly they had escaped an awful death!

"I wonder where papa is," said Pearl, shivering. "I hope he is waiting for the storm to pass over."

"I hope so," said Kathie, but she did not think so, and thought of her father trying to find his way home in the black darkness through the rain and hail filled her with fear, and the recollection of all the uncovered shafts and deep holes half filled with sharp stones and broken bottles rose unbidden to her mind and made her shiver with something more than cold.

After an hour or two the storm began to abate, the hail ceased, and the rain fell less heavily, while the wind went down, and the thunder and lightning became less terrific. But though thankful that at last the storm was passing over, every moment increased their discomfort. More than ancle-deep in mud and water, their clothes drenched, their hair streaming, their teeth chattering with the cold, which had become intense, and filled with anxiety on their father's account, they were truly in a pitiable plight. Kathie feared to think of what would be the consequences to Clive and Sydney, the former always delicate, and the latter scarcely yet recovered from his severe illness of two months ago, and she could hardly feel thankful for their recent narrow escape from death or terrible injuries when the dreary future full of dark possibilities rose before her mind. What a Christmas Eve! The thought of happy, sheltered homes, full of warmth, laughter, and brightness, seemed to make their own situation the more wretched by contrast. Throwing her arms around the wet, trembling forms of the two boys, her courage, faith, and self-possession all deserted her, and, bowing her head over them, she shed some of the bitterest, most hopeless tears she had ever shed in all her life before. It needed only Kathie to break down for all the others to do so also, and for a time only the sound of weeping was heard in the little hut. But it was not for long, for, feeling ashamed of her

weakness, Kathie presently dashed the tears away, exclaiming, "How foolish we are! and how wicked, too, to give way like this when we ought to be thanking God for preserving our lives and bringing us unhurt through such terrible danger! Hark!" she added; "I hear papa's footsteps, I am sure," and springing joyfully to the entrance, she peered out, and saw by the light of the moon, struggling faintly through the clouds, her father standing still with clasped hands gazing down at the fallen house.

"Papa," she called, "we are here—we are safe!" and the next moment he was in the hut, clasping them to his heart as we clasp those who have just been restored to us from the very jaws of death.

"You are all here—all safe! Oh, my darlings, thank heaven for that! Only God knows what were my feelings when I came and found the house a heap of ruins, and thought that you were all lying under it."

"And where have you been all the time, papa; not out in this terrible storm surely?"

"Yes, I did not leave the town until the storm had commenced. I should not have believed it possible for me to lose my way; but in the intense darkness I did so. I wandered about trying to regain the path I had missed, and after a long time I found myself on the bank of the river, a little above the pont. A flash of lightning revealed to me where I was. An instant later I must inevitably have been drowned, for I was just about to step down the bank into the water, and if I had done so I should never have come out again alive. Oh, my darlings! I can hardly believe that I have you here, all alive and unhurt, after all we have gone through to-night."

Christmas morning rose calm and bright upon a scene of desolation. Not one of the Milners' tents was left standing, indeed there was scarcely a tent or canvas house on the diggings which was not flat; the canvas was stripped, the poles broken, and the hillside strewed far and near with fragments of their household goods—blankets, pillows, and articles of clothing were found yards away buried in mud, or hanging in festoons from the rocks and bushes, while, greatest loss of all, and one over which poor Pearl shed many tears in secret—Lena's piano was broken into a hundred pieces. The whole of Christmas Day was spent in collecting the few things which had not been completely ruined, in drying them, in mending what could be mended,

and, by the help of one or two good-natured diggers, who had suffered almost as much themselves, in putting up their tents again. As for the little dining-room, it was useless to think of trying to put it together, for the woodwork was cracked and broken into fragments, and the iron twisted and bent.

Tired and worn out they went to bed that night, on dry beds and blankets it is true, but with the knowledge that they had scarcely a thing in the world which was not completely destroyed by mud and water, and feeling that they had come out of the storm with little besides their lives.

CHAPTER XLI.

STRANGER THAN FICTION.

"Isn't Hetty ready yet? It is taking her a long time to get into that wedding finery. She must mean to eclipse the bride herself."

"She will be ready in a little while. She has been arranging the flowers that Mr. Vere sent. Alice asked her to bring as many as possible, their own garden could only furnish enough for the breakfast table."

Mr. and Mrs. Brown were seated at the table waiting for Hetty's appearance to begin breakfast. They were no longer at Klipkopjes; they had for the past few months been living in the town, or rather in a large, handsome villa, at a little distance from the town.

When Mr. Brown had returned from his journey to Krugersdoorp, and heard to what alarm and danger his wife and daughter had been exposed, he at once determined to quit Klipkopjes. He rode off that very day, chose and bought a pleasant building site, and gave masons, carpenters, painters, and paper-hangers no rest until his house was finished. He ordered a suite of furniture from Kimberley, and did not breathe freely until it was ready and the removal from Klipkopjes effected.

Hetty was a little sorry to leave, for the restraints of town life, the wild, free farm where she had spent so many months. But she soon grew to love the handsome, luxuriously finished villa—as Hetty would always love any place that was her home, whether it was a palace or a hut.

Mr. Vere missed his tenants sadly when they were gone,

and the rooms they had occupied and made so bright and homelike were closed and empty once more. Mr. Brown never failed to try to persuade him to leave his lonely farm-house and come to live in town.

"I can't think what attraction that place can have for you," he said one day. "You would be twice as well off in town."

"I am as comfortable there as I should be anywhere," Vere answered, with a smile a trifle sadder than usual.

"Comfortable! in that little draughty place!" Mr. Brown exclaimed. "I'm afraid you have very bad taste. I don't know how you can be content to mope there when half-a-dozen of the best houses in Johnnesburg belong to you. Why, there is that place you have just built; it would suit you exactly; it is far enough from town to ensure quiet and retirement, and it has the advantage of being near to us."

Mr. Vere smiled again and shook his head.

"I dare say you think me a dull, gloomy sort of fellow, Mr. Brown," he said, "but I would not exchange my free, quiet life and my shabby little shanty at Klipkopjes for all the handsome houses in the country."

So Mr. Brown shrugged his shoulders and gave it up, and was obliged to content himself with seeing his friend once or twice a week.

Mr. Brown had realised his most sanguine hopes; he had long ago paid his debts to the uttermost farthing, he had a large balance at the bank, a considerable sum invested in shares, besides a good deal of property in different parts of the town.

Hetty had not completed her toilette when there came a tap at the door of the breakfast room, and Mr. Vere entered with a handful of letters and papers.

"I have been to the post office," he said, "and have brought quite a budget for you, Mrs. Brown—no less than five letters."

"And three with the East London post-mark. Thank you, Mr. Vere; you could not have brought me anything that would be more welcome."

"And for which, if you will sit down and wait until Hetty puts in an appearance, she will reward you with a cup of coffee," added Mr. Brown.

Mr. Vere hesitated for a moment, and then accepted the invitation. He sat down, and a few minutes later Hetty

came into the room followed by Oswald carrying a huge basket of flowers.

"Dear me! how grand we are!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, ostentatiously making way for her. "I told you, Marion, she was bent on eclipsing the bride."

Mrs. Brown looked up at Hetty from the letter she was reading, as she stood in her soft, shining dress of creamy Indian silk, which set off to perfection her dainty face with its rich, soft bloom and starry eyes, and a fond, proud smile crossed her lips, while Mr. Vere thought that the face would be fair indeed which hers did not eclipse. "Who is the bride?" he asked.

"Alice Barry, an old friend and distant cousin of mine."

"And Hetty is going to-day to fulfil a long-standing promise, and act as her bridesmaid," added Mrs. Brown.

"Well, suppose we have breakfast," said Mr. Brown. "Do you think you can pour out coffee in that gown, Hetty?"

"Of course I can, father; didn't I come here for the purpose?"

"Very well, begin then. Mr. Vere, I suppose if I ask you to take breakfast with us you will tell me as usual that you breakfasted an hour ago."

"No, Mr. Brown, I should say two hours ago this time; Rollo and I had breakfast at seven o'clock."

"You are early fellows. I never thought that an old farmer like me could ever get into the way of keeping late hours; but it's Hetty's fault—she won't get up early."

"Oh, father! how can you say so? Have I not been up before you every day this week?"

"Have you? What about last week then? Well, Marion, what's the news? Are you going to keep Mary's letter all to yourself?"

"No, you are welcome to a share of it. Hetty, your aunt tells me, among other pieces of news, that Charlotte is going to be married soon, and I am sure you cannot guess to whom."

"To Mr. Durnford?"

"No; guess again."

"Charlie Somers?"

"Wrong again, to———George French."

"Really mother! To George French! I am very glad."

"Are you quite sure, Hetty?" asked Mr. Brown, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "George French is a

sensible young man, it's his opinion that if you can't get the best, make the next best do."

"He is a very nice young man," said Mrs. Brown speaking up at once in defence of her old favourite.

"Oh, yes, I know, a very nice young man, so clever, and sensible, such a good son to his mother, if all young men, &c.—quite sure, Hetty?"

"It's remarkable," he continued turning to Mr. Vere, "how fond that young man has always been of me, he's always been determined to have me for a relation. And so it's my nephew-in-law he's going to be after all; well, well!"

Breakfast over, Mrs. Brown and Hetty withdrew to don hats and gloves, and Mr. Brown having lighted a cigar was comfortably smoking when they returned. "What, finished already!" he exclaimed. "Oswald, you had better tell John to put the horses in and bring the carriage round."

"Why, isn't the carriage ready yet?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"No, my dear, I thought it would take Hetty half-an-hour to get that hat on right. I judged from the length of time the first part of the performance took. But never mind, if we are late so much the better, there'll be less of the fuss to go through."

"Oh, father, what a sly hypocrite you are, pretending that you don't like champagne and bride-cake!" exclaimed Hetty.

"I am not pretending anything of the kind; if you and your mother will go without me, and bring me home a bottle of champagne and a good wedge of cake, I'll show you how I appreciate both; but to have to go through a long affair in the church, which they'll drag out as long as possible, and then to sit down at two o'clock to a tedious breakfast with fifty or sixty other people, and all the dresses and fuss and nonsense—it's really a little too much at my time of life."

"And the speechifying," put in Hetty wickedly; "you are sure to be asked to propose, or reply to something, father."

Mr. Brown's face of disgust and consternation was irresistible. "If I thought that——" he began, but Hetty's ringing peal of laughter, in which all the others joined, stopped him. "Well," he added ruefully, "I suppose it is too late to cut the whole concern, or I'd do it, but mind you give them a hint, Hetty, that nothing puts me out like

being asked to make a speech, and that I'll certainly refuse if they do ask me. Come now, if you are ready, here is John."

Mr. Vere handed the ladies into the carriage, and after watching them drive off, mounted his horse and rode away in the opposite direction.

A few hours later he was returning, carefully steering his horse through the midst of the numerous vehicles, equestrians, and foot passengers that thronged the streets, when a light dog-cart, drawn by a pair of fiery black horses over which the driver appeared to have lost all control, dashed round a corner and straight upon him. He swerved hastily to the left, the cart swerved to the same side, and the next instant, the pole of the cart struck his horse with fearful force full in the chest. For a few seconds the three animals reared and plunged in frantic terror, then the black horses, extricating themselves, suddenly dashed away, galloping madly round a corner, scattering the crowd in every direction. Mr. Vere hastily dismounted from his wounded horse, and not a moment too soon, for the poor creature, trembling in every limb, fell heavily over, the stream of blood which poured from its ghastly wound, dyeing its satin coat and staining its silvery white mane. He knelt down beside it, stroking its glossy neck with a shaking hand, while a mist gathered before his eyes "My poor Alba," he murmured, "must I lose you too, my faithful, old friend?"

The horse lifted its head from the ground, rubbed it against his master's shoulder, and then fell back dead. For a few minutes he knelt, still scarcely believing that his favourite was really dead, then he rose and walked away unable to bear the sight. After giving directions for the animal's removal and staying to see them carried out, he called a cab and drove to Mr. Brown's house, grieving deeply for the loss of the noble creature whose fleetness and docility had, on more than one occasion, saved his life.

They had not returned from the wedding when he reached the house, and he was about to drive away again; but remembering that he had promised Mr. Brown that he would not leave without letting him know what was the report of the eminent engineer, whom he had been that morning to see, upon a piece of land which was the joint property of himself and Mr. Brown, he went into the drawing-room to wait until he returned. On the wall

hung a portrait of Hetty painted by himself a few months before, and given as a birthday present to her mother; and to this he went as soon as he entered the room as if drawn towards it by some silent but irresistible power. He gazed at it for a long time, his own face growing less sad and sombre as he did so.

"Dear, noble-hearted Hetty!" he murmured. "I think I could teach her to care for me if I were scoundrel enough to try, but I am not. She must never know how dear she is to me, how unspeakably precious her simple genuine trust and sympathy have grown to me; she must never know. And yet she will know if I stay here, for twenty times I have been on the point of telling her. I wonder what she would say to me if I were to tell her my shameful story. I think she would be more inclined to pity than to blame me; she is so generous, so deep-souled, for all her laughing, sunshiny ways. She is like Laurie in that respect, only brighter, gayer, and stronger in every way than poor little Laurie ever was. Poor Laurie, lying in that lonely, neglected grave in Scotland—but no," he broke off, his tone changing to one almost fierce in its pain and yearning. "Happy Laurie! safe from life's storms and bitterness, at rest for ever. Would to God that I were!"

Just then a little rustling sound caused him to look round, and he caught sight of Hetty's ivory silk disappearing through the doorway. He hastened after her before she had time to escape.

"Don't run away, Miss Hetty," he said. "I did not know that you had returned."

"We have just come back," she answered, looking rather wistfully at him, knowing the light tone to be assumed; "mother has gone to lie down, she is very tired, and a terrible sight we saw has made her feel faint and ill; it was terrible!" and Hetty sat down and covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out the remembrance of what she had been compelled to witness.

"What was it?" he inquired, "it has made you feel faint too."

"Yes," she said, shuddering, "I shall never forget it. Just as we were leaving Mr. Barry's house, our carriage and several others were blocking the road, some one called out to John and the other coachmen to move out of the way. But before they had time to do so, a pair of frantic horses, drawing a light, high dog-cart dashed in amongst them. In

a moment all was confusion, the other horses became frightened, and the coachmen could not control them. The driver of the dog-cart, a gentleman, was thrown out in amongst the hoofs and wheels, and was kicked, and trampled, and most terribly injured, before he could be extricated. He was carried into Mr. Barry's house quite insensible, and, we thought at first, dead. In a little while, however, he recovered consciousness, and insisted on being taken to his hotel, and although Mr. Barry tried to persuade him to remain, and the doctor who was called in told him he would suffer terribly in being moved, he refused to stay, and demanded so fiercely to be taken away, that at last they yielded to him. Oh, Mr. Vere! he was fearfully injured. I do not think he will live;" and she turned so pale at the recollection, that he forbore to tell her of the death of his favourite Alba, which he doubted not had been caused by the same pair of fiery horses.

"It was terrible indeed," he said, "and must have thrown a gloom over the wedding party."

"It did; Mr. Barry was half inclined to look upon it as an evil omen until father laughed him out of it. And the strangest part of it was that he is the same gentleman who came to my rescue that day the Kafir tried to steal Tommy from me—you remember, I told you about it."

"I remember; and he is the injured man."

"Yes; I did not recognise him at first, for he wore an ugly red wig and a pair of smoked glasses, he was evidently disguised, but when they carried him in they were gone, and I knew him at once. Oh, I hope he will recover!"

"Very probably he will," said Vere soothingly. "His injuries may have looked very terrible to you, Miss Hetty, and yet have been very far from fatal."

"I know they might, but the doctor said he feared recovery was impossible."

"Was it Dr. Owen?"

"No, a stranger, he happened to be riding past, and Mr. Barry called him in; his name is Keith, I think they said."

"Should you like me to go the hotel and ask how he is now?"

"Oh, thank you! I should be so glad if you would."

"I will go with pleasure. To what hotel was he taken?"

"I don't remember; but father will be in directly, and he will know."

"I will wait until he comes then, and it will be better not to go until the doctor has had time to finish his examination."

"Thank you; yes, that will be better; and when did you return, Mr. Vere?"

"About fifteen minutes before you came; that engineer and I had a good deal to say to each other."

"Is his report of the ground favourable?"

"Extremely so; but, Miss Hetty, what is it? I see by your eyes that you wish to ask me something. What is it?"

"I did not know that I had such an expressive countenance," she said, laughing, but looking grave the next instant.

"But what is the question? You admit that you were going to ask one."

"One which it was very presuming of me to think of asking you, and one which——" Hetty paused, seeming to find an unusual difficulty in bringing out her words.

"One which——Well, Miss Hetty, I am not going to let you off; my curiosity is thoroughly aroused."

"It was a question which you would most likely think it very rude and intrusive of me to ask," said Hetty desperately. "Now, Mr. Vere, please say no more about it."

"But I must, you have made me curious, and, Miss Hetty, I thought you knew me better than to suppose I could possibly think you either rude or intrusive. Now what was the question?"

"I suppose I must tell you or you will think it was something worse even than it was. I thought, when I came in, you looked—I thought perhaps you had seen——"

"You thought I looked as if I had seen my phantom again," he said, speaking the words she could not bring herself to utter. "And hearing me talking to myself you fancied that I had lost my wits altogether; was that it? I have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking my thoughts aloud. No, Miss Hetty, I have not seen it once since the night I was riding home from B—— Battery—the night you played the heroine, you remember."

"Does Mr. Vere live here?" a voice in the hall was heard asking at that moment.

"Mr. Vere! No, he doesn't live here," replied Oswald's voice, "but I believe he is here just now; do you wish to see him?"

"Yes, at once if I can."

Hetty glanced in surprise at Mr. Vere, who had grown very pale and was leaning on the mantelpiece as if for support. What was the matter with him she wondered, and why did that look which was so like fear come into his eyes?" The next moment Oswald entered, followed by the stranger.

"What is your business with me?" demanded Mr. Vere, and both Hetty and Oswald thought his voice sounded strange, and his tone unnecessarily haughty.

"Are you Mr. Vere?" asked the man, regarding him in some surprise.

"That is my name," he replied shortly.

"Well, sir, there's a gentleman at the N——— Hotel who has been badly hurt—the doctor says he can't get over it—and he wants to see you at once."

"To see me!" repeated Vere, the strange look which had so frightened Hetty leaving his face.

"Why, Mr. Vere," she exclaimed, "it must be the gentleman I was telling you about. Was he injured by being thrown out of his carriage?" she asked, turning to the man.

"Yes, miss; it seems his horses took fright and ran away, and as they were turning a corner they dashed in amongst a lot of other vehicles that were standing in front of a house where there'd been a wedding or a funeral, I don't rightly know which, and the horses all got mixed up somehow, and the gent was pitched out right into the middle of them, and was dragged out more dead than alive, and taken to the hotel."

"And you say he wants to see me," said Mr. Vere. "Are you quite sure that it is me he wishes to see?"

"Quite sure; I was told to inquire here for Mr. Vere, and if he wasn't here to go to Klipkopjes Farm. The doctor says it's important that you should come at once, as he doesn't think the poor fellow can hold out long."

"I will go at once," said Mr. Vere, taking up his hat.

"You will come back as soon as you can and tell us how he is, will you not?" said Hetty, as he was leaving the room.

"I will, Miss Hetty, as soon as I can leave him. I am at a loss to know what he wants with me, I do not even know his name."

A little knot of men were gathered under the verandah of the N—— Hotel discussing the accident when Mr. Vere

reached it. He was shown upstairs, and Graham Keith, who had just left the injured man's room, met him on the staircase.

"Have I the honour of speaking to Dr. Keith?" said Mr. Vere. "They tell me that your patient wishes to see me," he added, as Graham bowed in the affirmative.

"He does; he says that he has a communication of the utmost importance to make to you," replied Graham, wondering who this man could be who was looking at him with Sydney Milner's eyes, and speaking to him in a voice which had in it an inflection of Kathie's.

"Have you no hope of his recovery?" Mr. Vere asked, pausing at the door.

"None whatever; he has sustained terrible internal injuries, he cannot live many hours longer."

Together they entered the room. The injured man lay on the bed, his face scarcely less white than the pillow it rested upon, and looking all the more ghastly by reason of a long, livid bruise above his temple, and the blood-stained bandage round his head.

As Vere caught sight of him he started back, and a look of half incredulous horror came into his eyes, while his own face grew almost as deathlike as that of the dying man. And no wonder, for in that livid, pain-distorted face upon the pillows he recognised the one that had looked at him through Hetty's parlour window—the one that had risen up before him above the rocks, that night months ago—the face of the man who with his own hand he had murdered five years before. He turned away and staggered against the wall as if suddenly deprived of strength and sight, and covering his face with his hand, he exclaimed, "Oh, my God! my God! what do I see? Is it he, or——" His voice died away as if the horror of the sight were paralysing his tongue. At that moment the injured man opened his eyes and fixed them upon him, and, as if drawn by some mesmeric power which he had no strength to resist, Vere went to the bed and dropped on his knees beside it.

"Gerald," said the dying man in a faint whisper, "have you come at last? Tell him," he added, pointing to Graham, "not to let me die till I have told you all."

"But tell me," cried Vere wildly, "what is the meaning of all this? Speak, for the love of heaven, and tell me, am I mad or dreaming. Who are you?" and he brushed the thick hair off his brow, and looked down at him with wild

eyes that looked indeed as if their owner's senses were wandering.

"Why need you ask?" said the other, a bitter smile crossing his white lips. "*You* have not forgotten Guy Despard."

"But, Guy!" he exclaimed, while the light of a great joy dawned in his eyes, "how is it that you are here and living when five years ago I—I killed you?"

"You thought I was drowned, but I was not to die such an easy death; I was reserved for agony like this." And he clenched his hands, and his brow contracted with terrible pain as a sudden paroxysm of coughing seized him. Graham went hastily to his side and held a cordial to his lips; he swallowed it with difficulty, and for a few minutes lay still, completely exhausted, his breath coming in agonised gasps.

"You must not talk now," said Graham; "you are exhausting all your strength."

"What does that matter?" he asked roughly. "I can't live, and whether I die an hour sooner or later makes no difference, and I can't die till I have undone the wrong I did him. I can't die, Gerald," he added bitterly, "until I have made the orthodox deathbed confession. Call some one and let him write down what I say, and bring some witnesses; be quick or it may be too late."

Graham went down stairs to call the proprietor of the hotel, and Mr. Vere, or Gerald Milner as we must call him now, and as the reader has no doubt long ago guessed him to be, despatched a hurried note to Mr. Brown urgently requesting his presence.

In due time they arrived, together with the officer of police for whom Dr. Keith had sent, and who was immediately provided with pen, ink, and paper to take down the dying man's strange confession.

"Explain to them, Milner," said he, "that I may have as few words to speak as possible, for every word I utter is torture to me."

"Had you not better wait until you are stronger and more able to say what you wish?" asked Gerald Milner, his deep pity for the man's sufferings conquering his impatience and all-absorbing anxiety to hear by what strange miracle this man, who he had believed had died by his hand five years ago, was alive and here to-day.

"Wait till I am stronger!" repeated Despard, his weak

voice full of impatience. "You know that I am dying as well as I know it myself. Do you wish to remain always branded as a murderer? Explain what is necessary and let me begin."

And turning instinctively to Hetty's father Gerald began.

"Mr. Brown, you have always known me as Philip Vere, but my name is Gerald Milner. You have heard it before possibly. I was accused of forgery and theft and of the murder of this man, Guy Despard; and of the last-named crime I have believed myself guilty until now. We had a fierce quarrel and were struggling together, and I, with all the strength of passion, pushed him from me, and he slipped and fell headlong into the river, the vicinity of which I had entirely forgotten until I saw him disappear beneath the water. I had no intention of taking his life. I swear to you, Mr. Brown, that I did not remember the river until I heard his cry and saw him disappear. I instantly plunged in after him and swam about in the river vainly searching for him until I was completely exhausted, then I climbed up the bank again; and then—I scarcely remember what followed—horror and remorse for what I had done nearly maddened me, and I fled away in the rain and darkness neither knowing nor caring whither I went. The next morning I fell down exhausted at the door of a small farmhouse. The farmer took me in without a question, and he and his wife nursed me through a severe attack of brain fever with truly Christian charity. When I was recovered I asked the man to bring me a newspaper. He did so, and, as I expected, I found its columns filled with the story of the tragedy of Natchley Bridge. The body of Guy Despard had been found washed ashore at a little village several miles below the bridge and identified. Despard," he broke off, "who was the man who was buried as Guy Despard?"

"My servant, one whom I had hired that day. He wore clothes which I had given him, and carried letters and papers of mine upon his person. It was by them, as you know, that the body was identified, for the face had been so long under water as to be unrecognisable. He had been drinking, and that I suppose was how he came to fall into the river. But go on, I will explain all that afterwards."

"When I found that the detectives were searching for me all over the kingdom," Gerald Milner continued, addressing himself now to Despard, "I saw that nothing remained

for me but immediate flight from England. I was a murderer, and there were no means of proving that I had not intentionally taken your life. I had not a shadow of a chance of proving my innocence. If I was taken, a shameful death, or at least penal servitude for life, was all I had to look for. The crime had been easily traced to me. All the clerks in our office had sworn that you and I had left the house in company; several people had seen us walking together in the direction of the bridge, and more than one had seen and recognised us as we stood talking on the bank of the river; my overcoat, which I had thrown off when I plunged into the water, had been found and identified. All was black against me. Even those who had known me best believed me guilty of the crime.

"Fancying that the man and woman who had nursed me so kindly suspected who I was—doubtless they had learned as much from my delirious ravings—and deeming it unsafe to remain there longer, I left them. They were noble souls, for though they doubtless thought me guilty of the murder, and also of the forgery and theft of which I was accused, it never entered their minds to betray me for the sake of the reward which was offered for information which would lead to my apprehension."

Gerald paused, and Mr. Brown held out his hand and grasped his as if silently to express his pity for all that he had suffered in those five years of exile and loneliness, during which he had been branded as a criminal, and endured a long agony of self-reproach for a crime which he had never committed.

Despard then motioned to Dr. Keith to hand him a cordial which stood on the table, and after drinking it, he began in a low voice, as if the effort to speak were indeed torture.

"Milner, I can hardly hope that you will forgive me, for it was a base, devilish crime I committed against you, and one long planned and deliberately carried out. I don't know that I should want your forgiveness if I were going to live; but I am dying and I feel that I should like to hear you say that you forgive me before I go. Forgive me Gerald, for Laurie's sake." The last words were spoken so low that no one heard them but he to whom they were addressed.

"I do forgive you, Guy," he said, "freely, from my soul; but why did you do it? I had never injured you."

"I did it because I hated you. I hated you for winning

what would have been mine, what always had been mine till you came between us and stole her from me;" and his weak, panting voice grew fierce and bitter.

Gerald did not interrupt him to deny the charge, though he might have told him that Laurie Despard's heart had never been his. He knew well that Despard knew it, and that in the knowledge was the sting now as then.

"When you pushed me into the water," Despard began, "I at first thought, as you did, that you were my murderer; but, as the current carried me down I contrived to catch one of the supports of the bridge, and to it I clung for some time. The frequent flashes of lightning revealed you to me as you swam about in search of me. My first impulse was to call to you, and with your assistance regain the bank, my second thought to leave you as long as possible in ignorance of my safety. I little dreamed then how circumstances and the devil were going to play into my hands. Well, I saw you return to the bank, having given up the search as hopeless, and I clung to the bridge until a passing barge picked me up. I went down the river with it, and then it occurred to me that it would be a sweet revenge upon you to leave you in ignorance for an indefinite period. I guessed that what did happen would happen, and that in the first horror and remorse at having as you supposed taken my life you would do as you did.

"The cold and long immersion in the water brought on a severe illness, and for several days I lay ill in a wayside inn where I had taken up my abode after leaving the barge people. The first thing I heard when I recovered was that the body of Guy Despard had been found and that Gerald Milner was accused of having murdered him, that the latter had disappeared, and that the police were searching for him in vain. Then my mind was made up. I decided to let you lie under the ban and to leave England. I had strong reasons for wishing to leave the country at once, for, as you have no doubt already guessed, it was *I* who slandered you to Blackwood, who forged his name, and stole the notes from old Steel's safe."

"You, Despard, you! I never dreamed or suspected it. And why, in heaven's name, did you cause their suspicion to fasten upon me?"

"Why? Because I hated you, because I wished to injure you, to ruin your reputation, and most of all because I wished to make Laurie despise you. You know that I could

copy any handwriting, and I wrote that paper which Steel picked——" his voice died away in an inarticulate whisper. Graham raised him up and held a tumbler of brandy to his lips. He took such a long draught that Gerald looked at the doctor in alarm.

"Will it not do him harm?" he whispered.

Graham shook his head. "It will make no difference," he replied. "Perhaps enable him to finish what he has to say; he is exhausting his strength terribly."

"Never mind the rest, Guy," said Gerald, bending over him as he essayed to speak once more. "You have already said enough to clear me of both charges. These gentlemen are witnesses."

"No, I will finish what I have to say. I forged the cheques, robbed Steel's safe, caused suspicion to fall upon you, and tried to make Laurie believe you guilty—pretending all the time that I did not think so myself—and I hated you all the more because she repudiated the idea of your guilt with scorn. I had intended to marry Laurie, and with the money I had taken sail for America; but when I asked her to be my wife she told me of her engagement to you. I need not waste words in telling you that I was mad with rage and jealousy, but I determined to triumph in spite of everything. You know how well I succeeded in making Steel believe you guilty of the forgery.

"I decided to leave England without Laurie if she would not accompany me. I felt safe in leaving her, for I knew that you would never claim her promise while a shadow of suspicion rested upon you, and I knew that you would not be able to prove your innocence. I guessed that Blackwood would decline to prosecute and that you would leave the office and Natchley, leaving Laurie free, and I believed that if a few months or a year later I went back for her, she would not refuse to listen to me. Ah, Gerald, I was punished for my sin! When I caused the terrible accusation of murder to be brought against you I killed her. I am Laurie's murderer just as surely as if I had shot her dead or plunged a dagger into her heart. When I learned that she was dead I knew that I had sinned in vain. I had waited, hoped, and toiled. I had lied and sinned to win her, and after all through my sin I had lost her for ever; that was my just punishment. The money I had taken was valueless to me; I dared not remain in England, for any

day I might be recognised. I might at first have come forward and cleared you of the charge of murder, but now it was too late to do so with safety to myself—a hundred unanswerable questions would be asked me as to the reason I had suffered an innocent man to lie so long under the suspicion of murder when a word from me would have cleared him, and very likely the whole story of the forgery and theft would have come to light—it was too much risk. And —I may as well tell the truth—even if there had been no risk I would not have uttered one word to clear you, for I hated you. I was almost glad that Laurie was dead; if I had lost her, so had you. And now I have told you all, I think—no not quite. The notes which were found in the pocket of your overcoat and which, in the eyes even of your best friends, proved your guilt beyond the shadow of a doubt, I placed there. Satan helped me and found me the opportunity."

"Have you taken down all that I have said?" he asked, turning to the officer. The latter bowed and carried the paper to the bedside that he might read what he had written. He read it through slowly, and then, motioning Gerald and Graham to raise him, he asked for the pen and ink; then, placing the paper before him, though every movement caused him the most intense suffering, the great drops of agony standing on his brow, he wrote clearly and distinctly the following words:—

"I, Guy Despard, who was supposed to have been murdered by Gerald Milner five years ago, am alive to-day, and in the presence of the undersigned witnesses, on this my deathbed, swear that it was I who forged the name of Edward Blackwood, my employer, twice during the month of July 188—, for a sum amounting each time to two hundred pounds, and robbed the office safe of the notes supposed to have been stolen from it by Gerald Milner. I also swear that the man whose body was found washed ashore at the village of Raye was Adam Weir, my servant."

"Read that," he said, when he had finished, handing the paper to Graham Keith, "and tell me if anything more is necessary."

"I think not," replied Graham, when he had read it, "that ought to be quite sufficient to prove Mr. Milner's innocence."

Despard then took the paper, and in clear, bold characters,

which could not be mistaken, he signed his name for the last time, and the others affixed their signatures.

"There," said the dying man, sinking back when they had finished, "that will clear you, Gerald; you can go back to England to-morrow if you like. Now, gentlemen," he added, turning to the others, "you may go. I thank you for your services. But you must stay, Gerald, and see me die. Now, Milner," he continued, when they were alone together, "you have heard all; can you say that you forgive me for my villainy, and for dooming you to spend five of the best years of your life in exile—disgraced, ruined, and separated from all you cared for?"

Without a moment's hesitation Gerald Milner took in his the nerveless hand which was already growing cold. "I forgive you," he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion. "I forgive you, Guy—fully—completely—as I hope to be forgiven. I am not wholly guiltless either, for only God's mercy prevented my being in very truth the murderer I was accused of being. I did hurl you into the river. I was a murderer in heart, at least, for I hated you."

"You had good cause to hate me then. And you bear me no ill-will now, Gerald?"

"None whatever; you have undone the wrong you did me as far as possible."

"As far as possible, yes. How far is that? I cannot give you back the years of happiness I robbed you of, and, oh God! I cannot bring Laurie back to life—my gentle, true-hearted Laurie."

Then another terrible fit of coughing came on, and when it passed, Despard lay back, white and still, with closed eyes and compressed lips, unable to speak; and Gerald sat beside him, his mind half bewildered by what he had heard, and almost fearing that he would wake presently and find it all a dream.

CHAPTER XLII.

TELLING HETTY THE STORY.

SCENE after scene of his past life rose up picture-like before Gerald Milner's mind, as he sat by the bedside in the gloom of the evening, which was fast filling the chamber of death, with the dying man's chilly fingers clasped around his. He saw himself a happy, careless boy at Beechwood Hall,

roaming through the woods or galloping over the fields with Kathie. Later on he was in Mr. Blackwood's office, the staunch friend of Guy Despard, whom he regarded with the warm affection and enthusiastic admiration of a very young man for one a good deal older, and wiser in the world's ways than himself. He saw himself liked, admired, and welcomed everywhere, a favourite with his employer and popular with everyone, a career of bright prosperity stretching out before him, the hope of making Laurie Despard his wife in the near future rendering it yet more bright.

All at once the scene was changed, and suddenly, and unexpected as a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky, his sun had gone down in darkness and storm; his hopes were wrecked, his life ruined. One day he had been happy, honoured, and beloved; the next he was homeless, a wanderer, a hunted criminal, with the fear of a felon's death before him, and overshadowed by horror and remorse for having taken the life of the man who had been his friend. He saw himself after he had left the house of the poor but kind-hearted farmer wandering sick and penniless about the streets of London in hourly danger of arrest, reading the announcement of Laurie Despard's death on a fragment of an old newspaper.

The days which followed, so full of despair, so full of grief, for her early death, which he guessed to be caused by the news of his crime, of utter indifference to his own fate, he could scarcely recollect, he never remembered how many days passed between the reading of that fatal announcement, and the evening when he stood in the cold and rain on London Bridge looking down into the black waters, more than half resolved to end all his misery and remorse by plunging into them, and had been seen and recognised by an old friend who read his half determination in his pale, despairing face and wild eyes. This friend had insisted upon taking him to his house, placed food and wine before him—for he was half famished—then won his story from his reluctant lips and—first gleam of hope in that black night of despair—believed it. Gerald remembered that from that moment he had grown less hopeless, less indifferent to his own fate. He promised his friend that he would never again yield to the demon of despair that had tempted him to end all by taking his own life. He promised to be guided by the advice of his friend, who counselled him to leave England at once.

If it had not been for his friend's determined opposition he would have given himself up to justice, and, perhaps, suffered death for Despard's murder.

"You are a fool to think of it," Harry Eden told him. "What chance have you of proving that it was an accident? None whatever. If you were alone in the world, and had no one else to think of, I would say, 'Take your chance; you have truth on your side, trust to Providence for the rest.' But you have a father and a sister whose hearts would break if you were sentenced to death or penal servitude, and you have no right to risk it."

Gerald did not listen to his friend's advice all at once; it seemed a cowardly thing to fly from the country under an assumed name, as if he were in reality the criminal he was accused of being, but in the end he yielded to his arguments and suffered himself to be guided by him. Harry Eden had gone with him to Southampton (from which place he had written that brief, passionate letter to his father, which had well nigh broken Mr. Milner's heart), forced a loan of money upon him, stayed on board till his ship was just about to sail, and then left him with a warm hand-shake and kindly words of hope and comfort. The memory of this man's friendship and firm faith in him when every one else believed him guilty of a double crime, was all that kept him from despair, utter cynicism, and infidelity in after days.

With sad, hopeless eyes, Gerald Milner had watched the shores of England fade from his sight; and from that day until the Browns came to Klipkopjes he had lived alone—utterly and completely alone. He earned money, and was very soon able to repay his debt to Harry Eden, by writing to the magazine of which the latter was the editor and proprietor, and in executing the numerous orders for pictures which he sent him. In these occupations, interrupted by occasional hunting trips into the interior, he endeavoured to forget the past.

Once since that first letter to his father he had written to him, telling him his whereabouts and manner of life, and asking his pardon for the sorrow and disgrace he had brought upon him. But that letter reached England after Mr. Milner had left it, and one day, months afterwards, happening to take an old newspaper, he learned that Beechwood Hall was up for the second time in the market, and that his father was no longer in England. He wrote to Harry Eden, requesting him to inform him of his father's

whereabouts; but he had not been able to do so; for though most people knew that the family from Beechwood had left for South Africa, very few knew to what part of the country they had gone; so Gerald was obliged to abandon the intention of communicating with them; and he wondered now that he was free to seek them, where and when he should find them. His heart beat at the rapturous thought that before very long he might see and embrace them all once more, and he wondered how he had borne the long years of separation from them all.

Free to seek them—free to go where he would, to resume his own name, to hold up his head among honourable men again—no longer obliged to bury himself in a lonely farm-house and shrink with fear from the sound of a sudden voice or step, or the gaze of a curious stranger's eyes—free from remorse and self-reproach—innocent of blood—free to tell Hetty of his love, and to ask for hers in return. He felt almost giddy with happiness, and, bowing his head low, he sent up the most earnest, heartfelt, grateful prayer of thanks to God, who had so mercifully and unexpectedly brought to light the hidden things of darkness, that had ever ascended from his heart to heaven.

The dusk deepened into darkness, and still the sick man lay motionless, his cold, clammy hand lying still in Gerald's strong, warm clasp.

Presently Graham Keith came in, followed by a servant, who lighted a lamp and drew down the blinds.

"Has he been lying like this all the time?" asked Graham, bending over the sufferer to listen if he still breathed.

"Almost ever since you went out," answered Gerald. "He is not dead, is he?"

"No, not yet; he breathes still; but the end is not far off."

Just then Despard's eyes opened, and fell on Gerald's face. "Still here," he murmured. "Don't leave me yet. Strange that *you* should be the one to watch beside my deathbed." Then raising himself and speaking louder and clearer than he had yet done, he said, "I dare say you wondered how I found out where you were, Milner; but I have known for a long time that Philip Vere of Klipkopjes and Gerald Milner were one and the same. I saw you in the street, and though you are a good deal changed since the old days, I knew you at once, and unseen by you, I followed you and found out where you lived. Did you not see me? I fancied

you did; you were standing at the window with that pretty, little brown-eyed girl, and I was leaning over the wall under the blue-gums; I thought you saw me."

"I did see you."

"Ah! and you thought I was a ghost. I meant you to think so. I wanted to frighten you away from Johannesburg, for as long as you were here I ran the risk of being recognised by you."

"No, I did not think you were a spirit, except for an instant; I thought that I was going mad."

"Poor old Gerald!" murmured Despard. "I would not have made you suffer like that if I had known; I only meant to frighten you away. And the night you were riding along the road towards your farm, I was sure you saw me then."

"Yes, I saw you, but I fancied you were a vision conjured up by a diseased brain; that night convinced me that I was losing my reason."

"Poor old Gerald!" Despard said again. "Milner, how can you ever forgive me for all I have made you suffer? There is one thing more I must say to you, he went on, after a long silence. "I am a rich man, Gerald. A month ago I made my will, and all that I possess I have left to you. No, don't interrupt me; don't refuse it; take it, to prove that you forgive me. I made my will a month ago, for I knew that the end was coming. I should not have lived much longer even if this accident had not occurred, for consumption, the curse of our family, had long ago claimed me for its victim. I have no relations, near or distant, who have a right to my money. I have provided amply for Laurie's aunt, Mrs. Lee—if she is still living, I know you will find her and give her the money—and to Blackwood I have left a sum three times as large as that I robbed him of; the rest is yours."

"I do not want your money, Despard, nor need it. I am very far from being a poor man; everything in which I invested money for the past two years has turned out well. I have several properties in and about the town, and I might sell my farm any day I chose at my own price. I do not want your money, Guy, I hope you will yet recover and live to enjoy it."

"I do not want to live; my life for years has been a tissue of lies, deceit, plotting, and striving for wealth which I was too idle and luxurious to work for, and I have been hard up and head over ears in debt until a year ago—strange

that wealth should come to me just as I had learned that I could not live to enjoy it. I am dying, Gerald, do not try to deceive yourself or me. I am dying, by this time to-morrow I shall be dead. I am dying at six-and-thirty, having lived long enough to see every hope, desire, and ambition I have ever cherished end in bitter disappointment. Don't pity me, I have deserved it. When you have seen me laid in my grave—I know you will stay for that—you will go at once to your people and tell them the good news. Do you know where they are?"

"No," replied Gerald sadly. "I heard more than three years ago that they had left England for South Africa; but at what port they landed, or whether they have since gone back, I do not know. Can you tell me where I shall find them?"

"No, but perhaps I can give you a clue. Some time ago when I was in Kimberley I saw at a concert to which I had gone to kill an hour, two girls who I am almost sure were your sisters, and—and—and——" he strove to finish the sentences, but in vain, a deeper pallor overspread his face and he fell back in a heavy swoon. Gerald hastily summoned the doctor to his aid, but Guy Despard never opened his eyes in this world again. After lying still and motionless so long that they thought the end had come, his pale lips moved, and by bending low over him Gerald heard the words, "Always generous forgives—be buried with me——" and raising one hand to his throat his lifeless fingers closed over something there, which Gerald afterwards found to be a tiny locket containing Laurie's portrait and a silky lock of her hair. Gerald Milner could scarcely believe that only a few hours had passed since he had left Mr. Brown's house, when he found himself once more in the street. He had not walked many yards from the hotel when Mr. Brown joined him.

"Why, Mr. Brown," he exclaimed in surprise, "I thought you went home hours ago?"

"No, I waited for you, is it all over?"

"Yes, he is dead, poor fellow! poor Despard! Oh, Mr. Brown! what a death! Alone in a foreign land, without a single soul to regret him or shed a tear for him, after having, as he said himself, lived to see every hope of his life disappointed."

Mr. Brown looked at the speaker, somewhat surprised at the absence of every feeling but pity towards the dead man who had so grievously wronged him.

"It is not every man who would forgive such an injury so readily as you seem to have done," he said.

"I have no room in my heart for any feeling but pity," Gerald replied. "How can I do ought but forgive him? Mr. Brown, I believe he has suffered almost more than I have done during the past five years."

"He deserved to suffer; I don't think I ever heard of a more dastardly crime. I believe I find it harder to forgive him than you do, Vere—or Milner— which is it to be?"

"Milner, if you please; thank heaven the need for an assumed name no longer exists. When I left England I thought I had left that name behind me for ever. The name I have borne since in some sort belongs to me, for my mother's maiden name was Vera Philips."

"Is your mother living?"

"No, she died when I was little more than a child."

"And your father?"

"He is living still, please heaven," said Gerald fervently. He was alive and well when I saw him last. My poor father! I know my disgrace must have almost broken his heart; and Kathie—I know she would believe me innocent if all the world declared me guilty. Oh, Mr. Brown, the thought that I shall soon see them all again is almost too much happiness."

"God grant that you will find them all safe and well," said Mr. Brown, wringing his hand. "It is like a romance," he continued, pausing in front of the house, which they had by this time reached. "I remember distinctly the evening Hetty sat in the parlour at home and read me the story; she had just come home from school for her holidays, and had brought with her a pile of English newspapers."

"Did you think me guilty?" Gerald asked a little curiously.

"To be sure I did. Hetty thought the contrary; but I told her that that was only because the papers declared you to be a very handsome, attractive young man."

At that moment Hetty, hearing their voices and uneasy at their long absence, came swiftly down the garden path.

"How is he, father?" she asked, then guessing instinctively that something strange and unexpected had occurred, she looked from one to the other, saying in an agitated voice, "Oh, father—Mr. Vere—what has happened?"

"Let me tell her, Mr. Brown," exclaimed Gerald eagerly and placing her hand on his arm. "Let me tell her my story, may I?"

"Of course you may; tell her what you like."

"Whatever I like," repeated Gerald significantly. "You mean that, sir?"

Mr. Brown nodded, and walked away up the path. "Whatever he likes," he said smiling. "I think I know what that will be, and I think I can guess what Hetty's answer will be too. Well, I'm glad. I'd rather give her to him than to any other fellow I know, George French not excepted, and so would Marion, I am sure."

"What is it, Mr. Vere?" asked Hetty, a little nervously, when they were left alone, though guessing from his face that the story, whatever it was, would not be altogether sad. "You have not told me yet how he is."

"He is dead, Miss Hetty; he died an hour ago."

"Oh, poor fellow!" she exclaimed pityingly. "Did he suffer much?"

"I fear he did, very much, poor Guy!"

"Why! did you know him after all?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I knew him; but it is a long story I am going to ask you to listen to, Miss Hetty, and before I begin I must fetch you a wrap, you will take cold with nothing over that thin, white frock," and without replying to Hetty's "Oh, I don't need anything, thank you," he hurried into the house, and, returning with a huge shawl, he fairly extinguished her in its heavy folds,then drawing her hand within his arm he led her away to the other side of the house where there were no noisy foot-passengers and rolling carriage-wheels to disturb them, and, pacing up and down the moonlit paths, he told her the whole wonderful truth which was so much stranger than any fiction.

Gerald told the story in his vivid, graphic way, yet simply and concisely. He told her of his beautiful, beloved, old home at Beechwood, of his father who was so proud of his name and stainless honour, and who was at the same time so loving and indulgent, of Kathie his companion and confidant, of "pretty little Pearl," and of the two manly, bright-eyed little brothers. He told her of his life at Blackwood's office, of his love for Laurie, of the forgery and theft, of his quarrel with Guy Despard, and all that followed, and he had a very interested and a very sympathetic listener. Hettie's eyes grew humid when he told her of his mother's death and his own and Kathie's passionate grief. She wept over Laurie's early death, and grew warm with indignant scorn at Des-

pard's treachery, forgetting that the man who lay still and cold for ever at the great hotel was he. Her heart beat, and the hand that rested on his arm trembled when he told her of the despair and misery of the days when he had wandered poor and friendless about London, in daily dread of recognition and arrest. She seemed to live over the time of which he spoke, forgetting that the danger was past now. And when he came to that part of the story where he bade generous Harry Eden farewell and left England behind him, she drew a long breath of relief.

He told her of his landing at Cape Town, where he had been a stranger in a strange land, of his coming to the Transvaal and purchasing Klipkopjes, "because it seemed to be the loneliest and most out of the world spot on earth;" how he had taken Tozeni into his service, and with him Alba and Rollo, the latter a gift from Harry Eden. He had lived ever since, painting all day, and writing almost all night, the brilliant essays and articles which had made the name of Philip Vere a well-known one in certain literary circles in London.

When he had finished the recital he paused, waiting for her to speak, but Hetty seemed in no hurry to break the silence.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Hetty?" he asked, trying to look into the beautiful, averted eyes, on the long lashes of which the bright tears twinkled, and wondering why she stood so pale and silent, when he had expected words of warm sympathy.

"What can I say," she asked, "but that it is very strange and wonderful, and that I am very, *very* glad?"

"Glad?" he repeated questioningly.

"Glad of what Guy Despard told you to-night."

"Thank you," he said gravely, feeling disappointed, yet vexed with himself because he felt so; he had expected her congratulations to be warmer, and he missed something from her voice that he had hoped to hear. What a vain fool he had been to imagine for a moment that she cared for him. It was only pity for his loneliness that she had felt.

And Hetty was telling herself that she had been weak and silly, and—worst of all, that thing which she had always despised—a girl who had given her love unsought and unasked. She had fancied often lately that Mr. Vere cared for her; that she alone had power to lift the dark cloud from his brow, and dispel his sombre thoughts and

gloomy forebodings, but she knew now that she had been mistaken. He loved Laurie Despard; his heart was buried in the grave of that English girl who had been beautiful, highly educated, and accomplished, all that she herself wished to be, and could not.

"Miss Hetty," he began, after a long pause, "I am a little bit disappointed. I thought you would be a little more glad of the great happiness that has come to me than you seem to be. Can you realise what it means to me to be free from the stain of blood-guiltiness, which I thought must rest upon my soul and conscience for ever?"

"I can realise it, and I am very sincerely, truly glad," she said, and there could be no mistaking the sincerity of the sweet, earnest voice. "I cannot tell you how glad I am, Mr. Vere; and I hope you will soon find your father and all of them, and tell them the good news."

"Thank you; and, Miss Hetty, your father said I might tell you my story, and whatever else I liked, and there is something I have longed to tell you for months, but could not because of the past, and of the shame which was on my name—may I tell you now?"

"Of course you may; tell me whatever you wish;" and her voice told him that she had no suspicion of what that would be.

"May I tell you? But, after all, I am afraid that I cannot. I have no words strong enough to tell you how dearly I love you; how I have loved you almost ever since you came like a gleam of sunshine and warmth and beauty into that dull, lonely old farmhouse, and into my desolate, empty life." He waited for her to speak, but she did not, and he went on: "I tried to crush the love out of my heart, because darkened, disgraced, ruined as my life was, and always must be, I had no right to care for you; but I could not, for it grew to be stronger than my will. I have thought once or twice that you cared for me a little. Was I right, Hetty? or was I, as I begin to fear I must have been, vain and conceited to suppose that you could ever care for a gloomy, melancholy fellow like me, with the shadow of insanity hanging over him? Was I, Hetty?"

"No," Hetty contrived to whisper, and he clasped her hands in his, a light coming into his handsome eyes, which made his grave, sad face singularly like the bright, boyish one of the portrait Mr. Milner loved to look at.

"I was not mistaken then; you have learned to love me

a little. My Hetty, how can I ever thank you? But, Hetty, I see the question in your eyes again, what is it? You are not quite sure, after all, that you do care for me, is that it?"

"No, it is not that."

"Not that. What is it then? I can bear anything else."

"You said that you loved Laurie Despard," Hetty said, in a low voice, and bringing out the words with a good deal of difficulty.

"Is that it?" he exclaimed, his face and voice growing grave instantly. "I did love her, and I shall always love her memory. But because I loved Laurie Despard then, do you mean that you cannot love me now, or that I must not love you?"

"But are you quite sure that you do, because——"

"Quite sure that I love you? I am more sure of that just now than of anything else in the world, I wish I were one-half so sure that you care for me, Hetty," he added, dropping his voice to one of deep earnestness. "I did love Laurie truly and fondly, and if what happened had not happened I should never have cared for another; but I was a boy then, or little more, and Laurie never was nor could have been what you are to me."

And Hetty was content. She knew now that the love which was hers was a stronger, deeper, and more steadfast love than the boyish affection he had felt for Laurie Despard, deep and sincere though that had been, and never again did a shadow of jealousy of the gentle girl, who lay in her grave in a corner of the old Scotch churchyard, rise in her generous heart.

"Where are you going to look for your father?" she asked presently.

"I do not know, but I shall search the country over until I find him."

"Then you do not think he has returned to England, Mr. Vere?"

"What did you say?" he asked, smiling.

"I asked you if you think your father is still in this country."

"I know you asked me that, but what name did you put at the end of the question?"

"What name? Oh! I said Mr. Vere, I forgot it must be Mr. Milner now."

"Must it? It must not be anything of the kind. My name is Gerald, and you must call me by it, please; not Mr.

Vere nor Mr. anything. Think how pleasant it will sound to me after not having heard it for five long years."

"How lonely you have been!" she said, her eyes growing dark with sympathetic tears.

"Very lonely; but I am not going to think of that now, for I shall never be lonely again. But I have not answered your question, Hetty. I think they must be still in this country, for poor Despard told me that he saw my sisters some time ago in Kimberley."

"In Kimberley! What did you say was your eldest sister's name?"

"Katherine—Kathie we always called her."

"Kathie Milner," repeated Hetty. "Then it is not the same."

"The same as what? What do you mean?"

"Oh! It was foolish of me to think so, for of course they would not be there, but a month or two ago I had a letter from a girl I used to know at school, she is living in Hebron now—one of the Vaal river diamond diggings, you know—and in her letter she described a wedding at which she had been present, and said that the wedding march was played by a young lady, a Miss Pearl Milner; I fancied for a minute that it might be your sister, but if her name is Katherine——"

"Pearl Milner!" he exclaimed. "Why, that is my little sister's name, but your friend would scarcely speak of her as a 'young lady.' She is only a child, she was scarcely thirteen when I left home."

"Thirteen!" exclaimed Hetty opening her eyes. "And that was five years ago! Why, she must be nearly eighteen now."

"So she must. Of course she is," he said. "What am I thinking of? But I have been imagining her the little fair-haired girl she was when I saw her last, and of course she must be grown up now. I hardly think my father would be living there; but it is not likely that there are two Pearl Milners, is it?"

"Hardly. Oh! I hope you will find them so near. Shall you write to Hebron—Gerald?"

"Thank you; my name never sounded so musical before. No, I shall not write, I shall go there myself at once. I am afraid to waste time sending and waiting for letters. And now let us go in, I have not asked your mother for you yet. Oh, Hetty! only this morning I was the loneliest, most unhappy, most disappointed man in all the world, and now—how much more God has given me than I deserve!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

GERALD AT LAST.

It was a calm fair evening; the sun had not long gone down and the western sky was still rosy with its parting flush when a travelling cart drawn by four spirited horses and containing two passengers—the one tall, handsome, stately, his face full of eager expectation, the other short, stout, and black, with a woolly head and small, twinkling, black eyes—crossed the river, drove quickly up the stony streets of Hebron and stopped at the door of the principal hotel. I need not say these two travellers were Gerald Milner and his Zulu servant Tozeni.

Only three weeks had passed since Christmas Eve, and the little group which gathered round the tea table in one of the patched and mended tents on the top of Natal kopje, had scarcely yet recovered from the effects of that terrible night. Kathie's face was pale and thin, there were dark rings under her eyes, which looked preternaturally large and bright, and the slender hand that held the heavy teapot was rather unsteady: Mr. Milner's head was bent, and his brows were drawn together, after the manner of one whose burden of cares and perplexities had grown almost too heavy to be borne. Pearl sat at the side of the table; her thin, flushed cheek resting on her hand, the little hacking cough that came so frequently causing Kathie to glance uneasily at her from time to time; while the boys wore a dejected, spiritless look sad to see on such childish faces. It was a melancholy little picture, and one which filled the watcher, who stood silent and unseen in the doorway, with the keenest self-reproach. He had brought them to such a pass. Through his sin they had sunk to such dire poverty, such squalor, and discomfort. He shuddered as he looked round the little tent, with its uneven, gravelled floor, its scanty, battered furniture, its general air of dust and forlornness, at the table, guiltless of cloth, on which was a large loaf of brown bread, some delf plates, and, at the top a row of dented tin pannikins, which had taken the place of their cups and saucers, not one of which had survived the storm. His eyes went slowly from one to the other of the little group, and back again to his father. He could scarcely believe that the bowed, drooping figure at the head of the

table really was his father, he looked quite twenty years older than the stalwart, handsome man whom he had last seen in the pride of health and strength five years ago. How changed—how sadly changed he was; and the words spoken by Cœur de Lion in self-reproachful bitterness came into his mind as he noted how all his thick, wavy hair had turned to silver. "Father, father, but for me it had not been so white." When last he had seen his father, his hair had contained fewer silver threads than were now sprinkled in his own brown hair. He gazed at the little group until the mist that rose before his eyes almost hid them from his sight.

"How heavily my sin has fallen upon them," he thought. "How can I ever forgive myself for all that I have made them suffer." He stood still, watching them as Kathie handed round the pannikins of tea, and Pearl cut up the uninviting-looking bread, wishing, but not knowing how, to announce his presence, so afraid was he of startling them. He dreaded the effect of a shock—even one of joy—upon his father, who looked so worn and ill, and upon Kathie, who was so pale and fragile.

It was not left to him, however, to decide how it should be done, for just then Rollo marched into the tent with a slow and dignified step, and walking up to Kathie laid his great, black muzzle on her lap. Kathie drew back a little startled.

"Why," she exclaimed, "where did this great dog come from? I have never seen——" Then, looking up suddenly, she met the gaze of the sad, brown eyes that were fixed so yearningly upon her; and with a passionate cry of "Gerald —Oh, Gerald!" she made one hasty step towards the door, but fell back in her chair, white and trembling like a leaf. Almost believing that Kathie had suddenly taken leave of her senses, Mr. Milner sprang up, and the next moment the long-parted, much-tried father and son were clasped in each other's arms.

It is hard to describe that meeting—the fervent handclasps, kisses, and embraces, the hurried questions and answers, and the eager exclamations, as they all gathered round the new-found son and brother they had never hoped to see again.

When the surprise and joyful excitement had in some measure subsided, they drew their chairs together, and Gerald sat down to tell his story, which they were so impatient to hear, and to listen to theirs, which was scarcely

less strange and eventful; and only those who for long years have believed a loved one guilty of a crime can understand the deep, intense joy which filled their hearts, when he told them of Despard's death and confession.

It was a long story, and one often interpreted by explanations and eager questions, and when it was ended the only word of reproach, if reproach it could be called, which Mr. Milner spoke to his son was, "Gerald, why did you never write or come to me."

"Oh, father, I can never forgive myself for my mad folly, but I was half beside myself with shame and self-reproach, and it seemed to me the only thing I could do to atone for what I had brought upon you was to bid you good-bye for ever, and ask you to forget me. Oh, father, can you ever forgive me for all the suffering and shame I have brought upon you, and upon all I loved?"

"Forgive you, my boy; I have nothing to forgive. I did not mean those words as a reproach, but, Gerald, it almost broke my heart to know that you thought your father too hard and unforgiving to pardon your error and pity your suffering, and too foolish and indiscreet to be taken into your confidence. It was hard to know that you had left England for ever without even a letter of farewell."

"Father, I know now how mad and wicked it was; but, believe me, I never thought you hard or unforgiving. I knew that you would be only too ready to pity and forgive me, and I felt that I did not deserve it, and that the best atonement I could make for all that I had brought upon you was to go away for ever. It was not long, however, before I saw my conduct in its true light, and I was filled with shame and self-reproach. I knew you loved me too well to forget me, and let me drift out of your life. I wrote to you telling you of my whereabouts, and imploring you to pardon my sinful impetuosity; but by that time you had left England, and though Eden, at my earnest request, made every effort to find out to what port you had sailed, he was unable to do so. If I had known that you were living here and thus, I would have moved heaven and earth to come to you."

"And how did you hear that we were living here?" asked Kathie.

"It was by the mearest chance—if there be such a thing—that I found it out. You are acquainted with a young lady, Miss Long—Annie Long, I think it is."

"Yes, I know her," said Kathie, wondering what was coming next; "but she did not tell you."

"No, but Hetty received a letter from her some time ago, in which she mentioned a Miss Pearl Milner as having been present at the wedding of a friend of hers—Miss Somebody."

"Miss Bernhardt," suggested Pearl.

"Yes, that was the name—Miss Bernhardt; and when Hetty learned that my name was Milner, she thought it possible that 'Miss Pearl' might be my sister. I could scarcely believe that you were living here, of all places in the world, and I came here quite expecting to meet with a disappointment. I am not quite certain yet," he added, "that this tall young lady is really the little madcap sister I left playing with dolls at Beechwood five years ago."

Poor Pearl! it was almost as hard for her to believe it, so little was there left of the gay, light-hearted "madcap" of Beechwood Hall.

"And who is Hetty?" asked Kathie. "Is she the Miss Brown of whom you spoke?"

"Yes," Gerald said, with the tender little smile which his sister had remarked before when he mentioned Hetty's name, "she is——I cannot tell you what she is. Father," he added, breaking off suddenly, and turning to Mr. Milner, "Hetty is prepared to love you as dearly as I do. Can you make room in your heart for another daughter?"

If Mr. Milner's thoughts flew back to the day when he had bent over Laurie Despard's coffin, Gerald had not time to notice a pause before he answered, "Room for another daughter—for your wife, Gerald, yes I have room, and a warm welcome. I shall love Hetty for your sake, my boy."

"Thank you, father, I knew you would say so. You will love her for my sake until you see her, and then you cannot fail to love her for her own."

How often during that evening Kathie's eyes wandered to her brother's face! Was it really Gerald she asked herself more than once—gay impetuous, laughter-loving Gerald; this man who was so grave and quiet, whose face when in repose was so sad, and whose very smile was tinged with melancholy? She had never imagined that five years, even five years of sorrow, could change him so, and her eyes filled with tears every time she looked at his early-silvered hair. How much he must have suffered! poor, poor Gerald! Much as she had loved the gay young brother of former

days, she felt that she would soon grow to love *this* brother even more. It was hard to forgive Guy Despard, even though she knew him to be lying in his lonely, unwept grave, far away in Johannesburg, and though he had atoned as far a possible for his sin.

Gerald, for his part, glanced at Kathie ever and anon, when he was unobserved, and thought her scarcely less changed; there was the same, fair, broad brow, with the delicately pencilled eyebrows, the same long, dark lashes and fair, rippling hair, but the eyes were changed, those bright hazel eyes which had used to be so full of roguish smiles, and sparkles, they were so quiet now, and the whole face was full of calm, steadfast patience which spoke of trials and disappointments bravely borne, of difficulties overcome—in short, which told of a spirit which had grown brave and strong through much chastening. Yes, she was greatly changed; but what her face had lost in light and colour, it had gained in depth and beauty of expression. But Gerald did not look only from an artist's point of view or he might have been satisfied, but with brotherly solicitude as well; and it pained him to see how fragile and unsubstantial she looked, how quickly the flush which excitement had brought into her face faded, leaving her pale and tired. What a dreary life she must have led on these dreary diamond diggings. Bitterly Gerald blamed himself for his share in bringing her there, but how dreary, and full of suffering those years had been, even he could not guess.

It was late before any one thought of going to bed that night, and it is doubtful if they would have thought of it at all, so much was there to hear and so much to tell, if Syd had not been caught in the act of manfully trying to stifle his yawns, and if Clive had not been found lying under the table fast asleep with Rollo for a pillow.

Mr. Milner went to bed that night feeling happier, and lighter hearted than he had ever thought to feel again. He could hardly realize his own happiness. It was as if a millstone, which had been about his neck for five weary years, had suddenly fallen off freeing him from a heavy burden of grief and shame. Gerald with him once more—Gerald restored to him safe and well, and above all, with no stain of blood or brand upon his soul! It was almost too much joy. And who shall say how many fervent prayers ascended to heaven that night from grateful hearts, scarcely able to believe that the heavy weight of sorrow, shame, and anxiety,

which had been their portion for so long, had passed away for ever?

It was early when Kathie rose the next morning, for there were a number of tasks which she wished to have finished before Gerald got up. She did not wish him to know to what menial drudgery she and Pearl had been reduced. She knew that already he reproached himself bitterly for the poverty and want he had found them enduring, and not by one feather's weight would she have added to his burden of self-condemnation. She dressed quickly but silently, for she did not wish to waken Pearl, and went out. But when she reached the tent where they had been interrupted at tea on the previous evening, she found that, early as she had risen, someone had been before her. The tin pannikins and battered teapot which she had left on the table was gone, and in its place were several packages, some loaves of fresh bread, a new tinpail full of milk, a basket of fruit, several pats of butter, and a dish of eggs, while from the kitchen came an appetising odour, and a brisk sound of frying. Evidently some one had been into the town on a foraging expedition; she knew it must have been Gerald, and blushed to think how empty he had found the larder.

She went into the kitchen, where very active preparations for breakfast were going forward. A bright fire burned in the grate, proving that Gerald was a better maker of vaal-bush fires than Dr. Keith; at the table, busily washing a pile of cups and saucers which were strangers to Kathie, was a short, stout, good-humoured looking native, also a stranger, but whom the reader will recognise as Tozeni; and in front of the stove, his coat off, his cuffs turned back, and a large fork in his hand. was Gerald engaged in turning the steaks that frizzled and spluttered in the pan.

"I am making myself at home, you see," he said, laying down the fork when he caught sight of her. "How are you this morning, my sister?" I fear you and Pearl had very little sleep last night, for I heard you talking until a very late, or, to speak more correctly, a very early hour."

"One cannot expect much sleep when one retires at one o'clock, you know," she answered.

"And, pray, what did you get up so early for?"

"To do what you have already done—to make the fire, and get breakfast ready. I think you had better hand the remainder of the business over to me; do you know you look very much out of place in my kitchen?"

"Not more than you do, I am sure," he replied, gazing down wistfully at her, and noticing that she looked even paler than on the night before, and noticing too the worn, shabby frock she wore, which struck him all the more forcibly coming as he did fresh from Hetty's bright, dainty toilettes. "Suppose we leave the rest to Tozeni and walk to the top of that hill; I have a thousand things to say to you, so many indeed that I scarcely know where to begin. Oh! Kathie, I never dreamed of finding you actually wanting the bare necessaries of life, while I who brought all the trouble upon you have been living in comfort—for the past three years in luxury even. I can never forgive myself, never."

"You must not talk so," she answered. "It has not been your fault, Gerald, and the want we have felt the keenest has been the want of you. Oh! Gerald, dear, it is so good to have you back again. I can hardly believe yet that this is really you."

"And I find it hard to believe that I am a free man, free from the load of remorse and guilt that darkened every hour, and—think of it—actually taking a walk with my own sister, Kathie once more. But do you know that you are very much changed, dear?"

She smiled a little sadly.

"Am I?" she said. "I could say the same of you, Gerald; five years is a long time."

"Yes; but you are more changed than even the five years warrant."

"And you are more changed by five years of sorrow than you would have been by ten ordinary years, I think; and what unnecessary sorrow!"

"It does seem so; but some day we shall know the wherefore. I needed hard discipline. I should always have been a headstrong, passionate fool if I had not had it. I needed to suffer; but you—if it were not that He never makes mistakes—I should say that you did not need such severe discipline."

"Oh, I did, Gerald. I was so proud, and passionate—I am yet."

Gerald smiled a little wistfully, thinking that there was very little trace of either pride or passion in that gentle, subdued face, with the quiet eyes, and grave lines of the lips. How different from Hetty's bright radiant face. "Kathie, I think you and Hetty will be great friends," he said.

"I am sure we shall. I am so glad you have won Hetty, Gerald; how lonely you must have been before."

"I can never tell you how lonely, utterly alone with my conscience, and fruitless remorse. I can never tell you what my life was until she came to Klipkopjes, and in those days when I feared I was losing my reason, it was only she who prevented it; she would not *let* me go mad."

"Tell me what she is like, Gerald."

"She is like—but," he added, breaking off with the smile which somehow Kathie could not get used to, it was so unlike the gay laugh she remembered so well. "I cannot tell you what she is like, but I will show you, I painted this just before I came away, specially for you," and he took from his pocket a card, about the size of an ordinary carte de visit, and, taking off the paper in which it was wrapped, he handed it to her.

"Thank you, Gerald. Oh, how beautiful," she exclaimed looking with surprise and admiration at the portrait, which was a perfect one of Hetty, with her dark brown, starry eyes, her sweet sensitive mouth, that seemed made for smiles, her soft, rich colouring, and bronze-brown coronet of hair. "Is she really so pretty?"

"Far more so; this is lifeless, and expressionless, compared with her sweet, changeful face. Yes, Hetty is really beautiful; it is not so much her features and colouring, though they are exquisite, but her expression is so lovely. One can read her noble soul in her eyes, and—— but what are you smiling at, Kathie? You think I am rhapsodizing, but you will only need to see my Hetty once to love her."

"I love her already for having made your life less hard and lonely."

"Thank you so much for bringing me this little picture of her. But there is papa looking for you, let us go back."

The days that followed Gerald's return were very happy ones. The diamond digging was given up, of course for good and all. Tozeni, much to his own satisfaction, was established in the kitchen and preparations for leaving Hebron were begun for the second time. Mr. Milner could scarcely bear Gerald out of his sight for a moment, and together arm in arm they wondered over the hills, talking of the past, and planning for the future, and Mr. Milner seemed to grow young and hopeful again in the sunshine of Gerald's presence.

Sydney and Clive admired Gerald hugely, and were heard

to declare in private that he was much "nicer" than they had expected him to be, and he was even taller and handsomer than Ambie, who, up to that time, had been their ideal of manly strength and beauty. Yes, Clive declared, he was handsomer than Ambie, and even cleverer than Dr. Keith. Syd was not quite certain on this last point; but on the whole both boys were quite satisfied with, and not a little proud of, their new-found brother.

There was at first some talk of repurchasing Beechwood Hall from its present owner; but that was at length decided to be impracticable and—for the present at least—not altogether desirable. Mr. Milner had no wish to return to England unless his son could accompany him; and Gerald, though comparatively wealthy, was by no means rich enough to settle down in idleness in his boyhood's home, even if he could have been content to do so. His prospects at Johannesburg were good, his investments were large and likely to prove successful, but his affairs required his personal supervision, and he could not leave them to the management of agents without more of a sacrifice than he felt justified in making. Moreover, he knew that Hetty would not be willing to leave her parents, and, though Mr. Brown was quite rich enough to follow the example of many of his fellow-colonists, who, after making a fortune on the Rand, had purchased estates and settled down in the old country, he would never do so Gerald knew. If, therefore, he decided to make his home in England, he knew that it would be long before Hetty would consent to share it with him. So it was at length decided that for all reasons it would be wisest to make their home in Johannesburg for a year or two at all events, and this decision gave both Pearl and Kathie considerable satisfaction. Beechwood had too many sad memories for Kathie for her to wish to return there just yet, and as for Pearl, she laughingly declared that she was more of an "Africander" now than an Englishwoman, and preferred remaining in the land of her adoption.

"Besides," she said, "Lena Bernhardt will be in Johannesburg, and England offers no such attraction as that."

It was a great relief to Gerald to find them all of one mind on this important subject. He had feared that they would all be eager to return to England as from a land of exile and hardship.

It was decided also, instead of the hurried journey to the

Transvaal by coach which had been thought of at first, that they should purchase or hire a couple of comfortably fitted-up horse wagons and travel slowly, that, as Gerald said, Kathie and Pearl might recover on the road some of the roses they had lost in Hebron.

"And," he said, "instead of travelling night and day at a gallop through the heat and dust, we can travel slowly and comfortably when it is convenient, and rest whenever we wish to do so, and so make the journey a long series of picnics. We shall be a month or three weeks in getting there instead of four or five days, but that does not signify, and what we lose in the matter of time we shall gain in every other way, I fancy;" and Gerald's plan was agreed on all hands to be a good one.

With the quick, competent Tozeni reigning in the kitchen, Kathie and Pearl had time to rest and to enjoy their brother's society; and many a pleasant afternoon they spent in driving with him, or in rowing on the river, and one pleasant visit they all paid to Mrs. Hout's farm. That good lady was delighted to see them, and rejoiced as sincerely in their turn of fortune as she had previously sympathised with them in their loneliness and poverty.

The whole of the money and property which Gerald had taken so reluctantly from Guy Despard he now settled on his father and sisters, and though Mr. Milner demurred at first, Gerald overruled all his objections and triumphed in the end. It was hard for Mr. Milner to realise that he was a rich man, and Kathie was sure she would never unlearn the art, which she had acquired with so much difficulty, of practising the most rigid economy in household matters. But Pearl told her she need have no fears, and that for her own part she knew that before very long the old, extravagant Milner habits would assert themselves, and that the difficulty would be, not in learning how to spend, but in managing to make ends meet.

The house next to the Browns, which belonged to Gerald, and in which Mr. Brown had wished him to take up his residence, it was decided should be the Milners' first home in Johannesburg. It was large and handsome, Gerald said, and though nothing like Beechwood Hall, it would be a pleasant and comfortable dwelling until his father could build or buy one that would suit him better. He therefore wrote to Mr. Brown requesting him to buy suitable furniture.

It is needless to say that the request was complied with, and several pleasant mornings were spent by Mrs. Brown and Hetty in arranging it for the reception of its future inmates. The room which was to belong to Kathie and Pearl, Hetty would permit no hands but her own to touch. Nothing could be too good, too beautiful, or too dainty for Gerald's sisters; and when at last she declared herself satisfied, it was a perfect bower of beauty which might have satisfied the most fastidious lady in the world.

The Milners made several trips to Kimberley, for there were many things to be purchased which could not be obtained in Hebron, and Kathie and Pearl enjoyed these visits, so unlike their first one to the Diamond City. It was a new experience, or renewal of an old one, to be well and fashionably dressed and driving in a well-appointed carriage once more. A duty call was made on Mrs. De Beer, for as Kathie said, when Pearl expressed her unwillingness to encounter the "iceberg," "they owed it to Ambie to be civil to his sister." The lady was not at home, and, considerably relieved, they drove to the little white-washed house where Mrs. Roberts lived, and where they were sure of a warm welcome. Mrs. Roberts was delighted to see them, and sincerely glad to hear that they were really going to leave Hebron at last. She showed them over her neatly-furnished and spotlessly clean little house, so different from the dusty Hebron tent, with pardonable pride, quite sure of sympathy and appreciation.

"And," she said to Kathie just before they left, "you can't think how my husband has changed. He's so steady and thoughtful, and he has never touched a drop of anything since he's been here. It's all Dr. Keith's doing; he has made a man of Roberts. Without talking to him like a temperance tract, he made him see the sin of drink, and see too that it wasn't hopeless for him to try and reform. You know how my husband went on when Johnny died. Well, I thought he would just go clean out of his senses and take to drinking worse than ever, and it's all owing to the doctor that he didn't. He often came to see us while he was in Kimberley."

"I wonder if the friend to whose sick bed he was summoned from Hebron recovered," said Pearl.

"Mr. Langton—yes, he is quite well again, and before the doctor went to Johannesburg he brought Mrs. Langton to see me, and she has come often since, and several times she has

taken me for a long drive, saying I would miss the fresh air of Hebron if I stayed in the house too much; she's a sweet woman, Miss Milner. The other day when she was here she told me that Dr. Keith was coming down to Kimberley for a week or two soon. I quite look forward to seeing him again, and so does Roberts. And, oh, Miss Milner, what do you think he did before he left for the Transvaal? If I hadn't liked him before I should have liked him after that—he had a beautiful stone cut and placed over Johnny's grave. It is what we would have done ourselves, but we couldn't have afforded it for a good while yet, and it was so nice of him to think of it; so good and thoughtful;" and she wiped away the tears which the mention of that lonely, little grave at "New Rush" always brought into her quiet eyes.

Kathie felt vexed with herself for her inconsistency, but though she knew that Graham Keith was not all Mrs. Roberts believed him to be, she could not help his praises sounding pleasant in her ears.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

KATHIE was sitting under the shadow of a huge pile of red rocks one bright afternoon, about a fortnight before the day on which they had arranged to bid a final farewell to the Vaal river digging, with all their discomforts, trials, and dreary memories. Her eyes wandered dreamily along the line of rugged kopjes to the purple hills, and then to the glittering patch of river, and the corner of the town visible from where she sat. The latter wore a somewhat festive air on this bright February afternoon, for in the morning Mr. Parkins and Miss Annie Long had been united in the bonds of matrimony, and the store in which the former had been a clerk, and had lately been made a partner, was closed and gaily decorated with flags in honour of the event, as was also the house of Mrs. Bain, who had so far overcome her objections to her nephew's throwing himself away on that "Long girl," as to insist upon having the wedding breakfast at her house.

Kathie and Pearl had been invited, and the latter had at first declared that she would not go. "We may as

well go," Kathie had said, "it will not hurt us, and they will think us proud if we do not."

Pearl had replied that she did not care in the least what they thought, but in the end Kathie and her own good feeling prevailed as usual, and to Mrs. Bain's gratification the two girls and "that awfully good-looking brother of theirs," about whom the nine days' wonder in Hebron had not yet died out, graced the occasion with their presence.

They had not long returned, having declined to stay for the somewhat uproarious dancing and merriment that followed the breakfast, and Kathie had sought her favourite spot, to rest after the fatigue of a morning spent in uncongenial society, and listening to conversation and jests which jarred upon her nerves.

As she looked around upon the scene which was so familiar to her and to which she was so soon to bid good-bye for ever, a heavy indefinable sadness seized her and a mist of tears blotted out the landscape.

"How can I be so wicked?" she said to herself after a few minutes, during which her tears fell thickly, "and so ungrateful to God for all His goodness to us? Is it thus that I should feel and act when Gerald is with us once more —with us, and free from guilt—when we can go away from this wretched place, when papa need no longer toil here in poverty, when the boys can be educated. Oh, how can I be so wicked? I have no right to be sad and despondent, when I ought to be filled with gratitude for all God's merciful care of us. If we were going to leave Syd behind us as poor Mrs. Roberts left——" The sentence ended in a burst of weeping which left her spent and exhausted.

Poor Kathie blamed herself and felt bitterly ashamed of her weakness; but it was in a great measure physical weakness and the natural reaction caused by the relief and freedom from wearing anxiety of the past few weeks, following suddenly upon the dreary time of watching and suspense, during which body, brain, and heart had been subjected to a constant strain. By degrees she grew calmer and began to take herself severely to task for yielding to such "childish folly," as she scornfully called it; for Kathie was not one of those women who feel the better for what they call a "good cry;" on the contrary, always self-possessed and reserved, accustomed to keep her feelings well under control, she felt ashamed of herself whenever, on rare occasions, she allowed them to get the upper hand.

Not wishing to return home with the traces of tears on her face, which Gerald and Pearl and even Sydney would be quick to notice and demand an explanation of, she sat still, watching the moving shadows of the bushes, and the motionless ones of the rocks as they lengthened with the waning day. Suddenly her eyes were arrested by the sight of a horseman coming down the road at a pace which, considering the nature of the ground, the great loose piles of rocks, and the numerous deep, uncovered holes, was to say the least extremely reckless. But it very soon became clear to her that the horse was running away, and that its rider was quite powerless to check its mad flight. On and on it came, the sparks flying from the flinty road as the hoofs struck upon it, and Kathie remembered with a shudder the deep, wide gully half filled with jagged, broken stones which stretched across the road, and into which the horse would inevitably plunge in a few minutes if it continued its headlong career. In another moment, as it came nearer, she saw with a shock of indescribable horror that the rider was Graham Keith.

She could not warn him of his danger, for he could not see her unless she sprang from the shelter of the rock to the side of the road, and this she dared not do lest she should still further terrify the already maddened horse. Helpless, with whitening lips, and feeling as if an icy hand were closing around her heart, she watched him as every moment carried him nearer destruction. She tried to pray but she could not, she tried to cry out but her voice refused to obey her will, and she sank down on her knees, a trembling, nerveless heap, just as the horse and rider rushed past her like a whirlwind. It seemed hours to her that she knelt thus, but it was in reality only a few seconds, and when she uncovered her eyes it was just in time to see the horse—riderless now—leap up the opposite side of the gully and gallop madly away.

Rallying all her strength for the effort, she rose giddily to her feet, and hurried as quickly as her trembling limbs would let her to the gully's edge. Graham was lying, as she had expected, at the bottom, upon a heap of broken rock. His face was colourless, his eyes closed, and one arm was doubled under him. Afraid to go nearer, but urged forward by a feeling stronger than fear and womanish shrinking from the sight of blood, Kathie scrambled down the steep side of the gully, tearing her hands and dress upon

the jagged stones and thorny shrubs as she did so, and with a choking sob of unutterable anguish she dropped on her knees beside him. She never doubted in that first moment that he was dead, for there was no sign of life in his colourless face. For a few minutes, that seemed like hours, she knelt beside him with clasped hands and white lips, memories of the old days at St. Bede's crowding thick and fast upon her. All that had come and gone since then she forgot—forgot that he had been mean and faithless, forgot that he had acted towards her as he never could have acted if he had ever really cared for her. She remembered nothing but that he had once been her ideal of all that was noble and high-minded, and that she loved him still in spite of everything.

"Oh, Graham!" she cried passionately. "Graham, speak to me; you must not die thus without one word or look. Oh, Graham! my love, my love! speak to me once more."

And then, as if her voice had power to recall his wandering senses, his eyes opened, and looked into hers with an expression of wonder and joy dawning in them, and his fingers closed tightly round hers.

"Where am I?" he asked dazedly, "and how did you come here, Kathie?" and then as he endeavoured to draw his arm from its bent, twisted position, he uttered a groan of agony and fell back fainting once more.

But Kathie's stupor of despair was gone—the knowledge that he lived electrified her into action, and, drawing her hand gently from his clasp, she took from her pocket a bottle of eau de cologne which Pearl had placed there in the morning, and saturating her handkerchief she bathed his forehead with it; and then, summoning all her courage, she drew his arm into its natural position. It was not broken as she had feared, but his coat sleeve was torn and soaked with blood, and she knew that it must be terribly injured. Unspeakably thankful that at least it was no worse, she lifted his head from its resting place on the sharp, broken flint, and laid it on her lap.

She had scarcely done so when she heard footsteps and voices above, and knew them to be those of Pearl and Gerald, who had come in search of her. Then she heard an exclamation as they caught sight of her and her prostrate companion, and the next moment Gerald had leaped down the bank and stood beside her.

"Why Kathie," he began. "Good Heavens! it is Dr.

Keith!" he added, breaking off suddenly in tones of amazement.

"Yes," she said without lifting her eyes from his white face. "Oh, Gerald, tell me, he is not dead?"

Gerald gave a quick glance at his sister's pale, agonised face, then knelt down and laid his hand over Graham's heart.

"He is not dead," he said, after a few minutes. "How did it happen, Kathie?"

"His horse threw him," she replied briefly.

"And you were here?"

"No, I saw it and came," she said, a quick shudder running through her. "But, Gerald," she added a little impatiently, "do not stay to ask questions; he must not lie here any longer."

"No, he must not," answered Gerald quietly; "I will go and get Tozeni and some other help, and we will take him home."

"No, Gerald," exclaimed Pearl; "you stay here with Kathie, and I will go," and stooping to press a kiss expressive of a world of loving sympathy on Kathie's cold cheek, she sped away, soon returning, accompanied by her father, and followed by Tozeni and several other natives, with whose help Graham was very soon conveyed to their little camp.

Gerald despatched Tozeni at once for the doctor, who providentially happened to be in Hebron, having come to assist at Mr. Parkins' wedding. He came without delay, and, to the relief of all, and the deep joy of one, he pronounced that the injuries Graham had received were far from being of a fatal description.

"It is a wonder that he was not killed," said the doctor, but I imagine that the bushes in some measure broke the fall, and so saved him from concussion of the brain. As for that injured arm, it won't be of much use to him for a good while; but if he remains quietly here for a day or two, nothing very serious is likely to result from the accident."

This report was so much more favourable than any one had dared to hope, that impulsive, warm-hearted Sydney, of whose affections Graham had won such a large share, burst into tears—veritable tears of joy—while Kathie hurried to her own tent to hide the emotion she could not restrain.

The next morning Graham would have returned to the hotel where he had been staying, but Mr. Milner and Gerald

refused to let him go, and insisted so positively that he should remain with them for a few days, that he was obliged to yield.

"What are you doing?" asked Kathie, going into her tent one afternoon a day or two later, and finding Pearl engaged in knocking off the lid of a dusty packing case. What box is that?"

"The box of books Mr. Hildyard sent up; you know, the box we left at Mosswood; one of the few things that unspeakable Durwood didn't carry off with him."

"But why are you opening it now?"

"Oh, I am going to read to Dr. Keith, and I thought I might find something here to amuse him. I am obliged to do my poor little best for him, for you seem determined not to exert yourself on his behalf."

Kathie made no reply, and Pearl continued:

"I don't believe you have gone in to see him once since he has been here, and I must say I think it is too bad of you after all he did for us when Syd was so ill. He must think it very rude and strange of you."

"I cannot help it if he does," replied Kathie, trying to speak indifferently, but feeling her colour rise under the steadfast gaze of Pearl's reproachful eyes.

"Yes, you can help it, Kathie; you might at least go in now and then and say something civil to him. He will be thinking that he is unwelcome if you do not."

"Surely you and papa and Gerald, to say nothing of Sydney and Clive, are sufficient to convince him that that is not the case."

"Not unless you try to do so too. By-the-bye, where is Gerald?"

"He has gone into the town, I think, to look at some horses Hans Hout wants to sell him."

"Has he? Then I must run after him and ask him to call at the post-office; there must be a letter there from Lena;" and thrusting a dusty volume into Kathie's hand with an injunction to "go and be civil to the doctor," she sped away after Gerald's disappearing figure.

Kathie stood still for a minute or two with the book in her hand, then an unacknowledged desire to see Graham once more, and the thought that perhaps, after all, she had been unmeasurably rude to him, decided her, and she walked slowly away to his tent.

It was the tent where Syd had lain ill so long, and her

thoughts flew back to the long, dreary nights when she and Pearl had watched over him, and when Graham's presence alone had kept them from despair. He was lying on the low stretcher, with a leopard-skin rug of Gerald's thrown over him. One arm was in a sling, his eyes were closed, and there was a very weary look of pain on his face. Kathie thought he was asleep, and was about to withdraw softly, without disturbing him; but quietly as she had entered he had heard her, and, opening his eyes, he looked up with a smile, expecting to see Pearl. It was impossible to conceal his start of surprise and pleasure when he saw who his visitor really was. Kathie went up to the bedside and gave him a hand which was somewhat tremulous; so was the voice in which she made her gravely polite inquiries as to "how he felt to-day." Then sitting down in a low chair beside the bed, she said:

"My sister sent me to read to you, Dr. Keith."

"She is very kind," he replied, the shadow falling over his face again. So it was Pearl who had sent her; she had not come of her own accord to see him. "Miss Pearl is very kind, but she should not have asked you to take so much trouble, Miss Milner."

"It will be no trouble," she said, not speaking very cordially however. "But I am sure I do not know why she chose this book of old Scotch poems for your delectation. I am afraid you will find them very dull."

"Probably she imagines that I am as Scotch as my name, but I shall enjoy them, I am sure; though I fear it is selfish of me to wish to keep you here reading to me when you would prefer to be outside enjoying this bright afternoon."

"Not at all," she answered, beginning hurriedly to turn over the leaves. "What shall I read? Do you prefer——" She paused abruptly, her eyes dilating, and a great wave of startled colour dyeing her pale face, for there between the leaves, and looking as if they had lain there for years, as indeed they had, were two yellow envelopes, both addressed to "Miss Milner, Beechwood Hall, ——shire," in Graham's own peculiar, unmistakable handwriting.

They were the letters she had waited and longed for in vain five years before. She gazed at them for a minute or two, and then raised her eyes slowly and full of mute questioning to Graham's face. He was looking at the letters too, and there was a dawning of a great hope in his eyes.

"Have you never read those letters?" he asked.

She shook her head, for she could not trust her voice to reply.

"Read them now then, Kathie; this one first, please."

She tore it open with shaking fingers, and Graham lay still and watched the changing expression of her face as she read it. When she had read it through he silently motioned to her to read the other. Kathie read it, holding it up before her face that he might not see the tears that filled her eyes. How strange it was to be reading those words written so long ago, with Graham lying there watching her —how strange! And, after all, he was all that she had thought him; he had loved and sympathised with and longed to be near her in those dark days. He had not shrunk from her when shame and dishonour had fallen upon her name. Kathie was almost frightened at the sweeping wave of happiness that rushed over her heart at this knowledge."

Presently Graham drew the letter from her fingers.

"Why did you never read my letters before?" he asked. "Was it because you did not care to hear what I had to say?"

"I never received them; I never saw them before. I do not know how they came into this old book; unless, perhaps I was out when they came, and one of the servants placed them there, thinking I should find them when I came in."

"Would you have been glad to get them, Kathie?"

"Glad?" she repeated, her voice trembling with emotion. "I waited, and watched, and hoped for them; and when they did not come, I thought——"

"You thought——"

"What could I think, but that you were like all the rest of our summer-day friends, who forsook us when we needed them most?"

"You thought that of me?" he exclaimed; "you might have been sure that nothing but the sternest necessity kept me away from you then."

"I was sure of it at first, and I tried to think so afterwards, but when day after day and week after week went over without a word, and you did not come, what could I think, but that you shrank from us in our sorrow and shame, as others had done?"

"I can hardly blame you, but you might have known me better. On the very night I wrote that last letter my mother was taken ill; for weeks she lay in danger, indeed

every day I feared that she would be taken from me altogether; and I could not go to you. I could have written again, but I was waiting for an answer to my letters, and beginning to think that it was only the heir of Home Woods you had cared for after all. I could not quite bring myself to believe it though, and as soon as I could leave my mother I went to Beechwood Hall, but it was only to find that you had left it; then I knew—or thought I knew—that you had never really cared for me."

"How could you misjudge me so?" she exclaimed. "How could you think me so mean and——"

"I was not very ready to think so," he interrupted, taking in his the trembling hand that was crumpling up the letters agitatedly, "nor very willing to believe it, in spite of your silence. But when I found that you had left England, without one word of farewell even, I ask you, in my turn, what could I think?"

"Anything, but that I was so pityfully mean and mercenary," she answered, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, which made her look more like the old, impetuous Kathie of other days than he had thought it possible for this dignified, self-possessed Kathie to look.

"I know now that I should have thought anything but that; but then there was no other explanation, and I heard too that with you had sailed a young gentlemen whose wealth and charming manners had made him extremely popular during the short time he had stayed in your county, and who was to marry 'our Miss Kathie' as soon as the ship touched the other side."

"Who was it presumed to say that?" she exclaimed indignantly.

"It was the landlady of the Osborne Arms who first told me that you were engaged to Mr. Hildyard; but I heard it from others afterwards, and he has not been to blame that the report was not long ago made true, was he?"

"No."

"And you have always belonged to me, Kathie?"

"Always, Graham."

"My darling! if I had only known! And you will forgive me now for believing what I did of you?"

"Yes, I will forgive you," she answered, a wonderfully bright, sweet smile chasing the indignant flush from her face. "If you think you can forgive me for having so misjudged you, Graham."

For answer he folded his uninjured arm around her, drew the fair head down on to his breast, and there was more than forgiveness in the kisses he pressed upon her lips.

I do not think that either Kathie or Graham regretted then, or ever, the five years of sorrow and separation which had passed, for they had been spent by both in patient "well-doing," and in learning lessons which would fit them not only for this life, but also for the life to come—lessons in faith, patience, and duty, which they could never have learned so well or so thoroughly in the sunshine. They understood each other now, and no faintest shadow of doubt or mistrust could ever come between them again. Their love would always be stronger, deeper, and more lasting for the troubles which had tried it, as gold is tried in the furnace, and they would be the better and happier through all time and through all eternity for those five years during which they had learned not only to say, but to know, and to feel, that "He doeth all things well," and to discern God's finger in every trial.

Two weeks later the Milners left Hebron, and Graham Keith went with them. The life on the river diggings was over for ever, and though not one of them could wish to live that life over again, not one could regret that they had lived it, that they had become acquainted with adversity, had seen the dark side of life, for through suffering they had been brought to know Him whom to know is life eternal; and that knowledge would, through all their lives to come, sweeten every bitter cup, and line with silver every cloud.

The future stretched out before them now, bright, prosperous, and full of hope; but they had learned to know that no human life can be all sunshine, and yet, while they looked for clouds to rise, they looked with the faith and courage of those who know that "Providence runneth not on broken wheels."

A very pleasant journey they had, resting, as Gerald had planned, when and where they liked, and travelling whenever they felt inclined.

When they reached Klerksdorp, Towser Chips was waiting to meet them and bid them welcome. He insisted that the two days they proposed to spend in the busy, little mining town should be spent in the neat, comfortable, iron house that owned him for its master. For things had gone wonderfully prosperously with the generous, kind-hearted American since leaving the diggings, and if they continued to do so a

little while longer, he declared he would be able to take a trip to America at the end of the year, and pay a visit to the hundred and ten cousins in Michigan. It is needless to say that the Milners rejoiced to hear of his good fortune, and before they left exacted a promise from him that he would come to Johannesburg to bid them good-bye before sailing for his native land.

It was a lovely evening towards the close of March when our travellers reached their journey's end, and drew up, not at their own door but at that of Mr. Brown, for both he and his wife had insisted that they should come first to them. The door stood wide open and a stream of light poured out revealing Mr. and Mrs. Brown on the doorstep waiting to receive them, and Hetty standing in the background, her beautiful eyes full of gladness and expectation.

The Milners and the Browns could scarcely meet as strangers, for each had heard so much about the others. Kathie and Pearl thought Hetty even more beautiful and lovable than Gerald had declared her to be, and Hetty felt, even in that first evening, what would be the sweetness of a sister's love, which until then she had never known.

They had not long arrived when Ambie Hildyard came to bid his old friends welcome to Johannesburg. At first he and Graham were a little inclined to look askance at each other; but before long they came to entertain a very sincere liking and respect for each other, which, as time went on, ripened into a true and lasting friendship.

Six months later there was a pretty double wedding in one of the churches of the Golden City. I need not say who were the brides and bridegrooms, but Ambie was Graham's "best man," and Pearl was the chief of the six fair bridesmaids; and Kathie hopes and believes that before very long there will be another wedding, and that on that occasion Pearl and Ambie will not play a secondary part.

And now, while the sun is shining upon them, we will take leave of all the friends with whom we have travelled so far.

THE END.

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